TOWARD A CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE CONTINUUM: AN EXAMINATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CULTURE & TEACHING IN RURAL TEXAS CLASSROOMS

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ABSTRACT

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Today, our nation and our world are marked by the increasing diversity of communities and schools. As the world becomes smaller and more connected, different skills and understandings are needed in order to effectively participate as a global citizen. Increased access to and contact with new perspectives, cultures, traditions and practices makes it necessary for school aged children to have a developed attitude of awareness and respect for difference. When the first encounter a child has with people unlike themselves occurs in the classroom, the responsibility to foster this kind of growth falls on their teachers. This study seeks to examine how teachers understand the relationship between culture and teaching in the classroom.

Using the theories of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy as a guiding framework, this qualitative case study explores how three fourth and fifth grade social studies and literacy teachers in a rural Texas school district understand the relationship between culture and teaching. Personal identity and ideology, experience with and exposure to difference, and understanding of comfort are discussed as key considerations in the shaping of each teacher's perception of culture and teaching. Finally, the idea of a Culturally Responsive continuum is introduced and discussed.

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Table of Contents

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction. For as long as I can remember, my deepest pride has come from my education. As I was challenged and then successful in the classroom, I built up confidence in my abilities and my family and community rallied around me. Because of this atmosphere and network of support, I loved school growing up. By the time I got to college, I had a deep appreciation for education and all of the opportunities that it had afforded me. It wasn't long before the value that I held in my education turned into a passion for all students to have equal access to high quality education in Texas. During my first two years at The University of Texas, I began to actively involve myself in K-12 education in Texas. Whether it was mentoring at KIPP: Austin charter schools, working for the Texas House of Representatives, or advocating for public school finance reform, I was learning more and more about Texas schools from many angles.

When it came time to choose a topic for this research project, I immediately knew that I wanted mine to be centered around education in Texas. My education had afforded me so many opportunities to chase my dreams, and I wanted to know what that looked like for other students in other classrooms. I had many ideas for this study, from textbook development to teacher retention, but eventually my focus boiled down to the basics of what happens in the classroom between students and teachers. The investigation that followed was a combination of perspectives I had gained through academic and professional experience, guidance from my supervisor, and literature on the topic. Though there were many ways to approach this topic, examining classroom education through the lens of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy seemed the most timely and appropriate.

Problem Statement. The way that our world is constantly changing and being redefined has consequences for education that cannot be overlooked. Advances in technology, travel, business, etc. are making our world increasingly smaller. Individual beliefs, party platforms, and politics are becoming more and more polarized. Our nation's communities and schools are becoming more diverse. Every time our world changes, the skills and understandings needed to take part in global citizenship change, too. To participate effectively as a citizen of today's world, especially with the hatred and violence that plagues the news, it is imperative that children develop an understanding of and appreciation for all people at a young age.

In order to function in a society that is constantly shifting and bringing us in contact with new perspectives, cultures, traditions and practices, it is necessary for today's students to be culturally aware and responsive. Cultivating an attitude of awareness and respect comes from experiencing difference for yourself. When the first encounter a child has with people unlike themselves occurs in the classroom, the responsibility to foster this kind of growth falls on their teachers.

But what does it look like for teachers to take on this role? The theories of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy offer direction for teachers who are seeking to influence the lives of their students beyond the basic classroom agenda. The theory rests on the idea of academic achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness. Teachers who employ these tactics seek to create a community of learners who think critically and view their world through a multicultural lens. The implementation of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in classrooms is imperative

in order to equip the next generation of Americans to be successful in their pursuits and interactions.

When it comes to the academic conversation surrounding culture and teaching, several themes emerge from the literature. First, much of the focus of research about the relationship between culture and teaching is concentrated in urban school settings (Brown, 2004; Epstein, Mayorga, and Nelson, 2011; Ware, 2006). Historically, schools in urban districts have hosted more diverse student populations, therefore making them more likely hosts for multicultural teaching approaches. As immigration (for any number of reasons) continues to alter the population composition of the US, the demographic of rural school districts has begun to change (Lichter, 2012). Increasing diversity in rural schools calls for the implementation and study of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in these settings.

Second, the conversation covers the intersection of culture and teaching in middle school and high school classrooms, but research focused on the elementary school level is less popular (e.g. Busey & Russell, 2016; Howard, 2002; Martell, 2013; Nagel, 2008; Milber 2014; Chenowith, 2014; Lopez, 2011). The articles that focus on middle and high school classrooms are right to do so -- as students grow older they become more aware of themselves, others, and the world around them. Understanding how culture and teaching can influence their perceptions and perspectives at this age is a worthwhile endeavor. Elementary level classrooms, however, are often the places where students start to really differentiate themselves from others and become aware of practices, traditions, cultures, and beliefs that are different from their own (National Council for the Social Studies, 1988). Understanding the implementation and impact of

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy at the elementary level is a critical part of the conversation surrounding culture and teaching that is missing at this time.

Finally, much of the research surrounding the relationship between culture and teaching examines preservice and inservice teacher training, but does not provide a thorough investigation of teachers' lived experiences as a factor in multicultural education (Wenger & Dinsmore, 2005; Frye, Button, Kelly & Button, 2010; Fitchett, Starker & Sayers, 2012). It is necessary to understand what works and does not work in preparing and supporting teachers who utilize Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. It is also important to examine teachers' experiences with culture and how their attitudes and understandings influence the way that they teach. In order to have a more comprehensive understanding of the effect of CRP on students, the academic conversation needs to include the role of teacher experience in shaping them as educators and pedagogues.

Research Questions. This study seeks to address the gaps in the literature surrounding culture and teaching by exploring the following research questions: How do fourth and fifth grade social studies and literacy teachers approach their curriculum in the context of culturally relevant pedagogy? How do the teachers' past experiences with culture and teaching influence their curriculum and teaching practices? How does working in a rural school district affect the teachers' inclusion of culturally relevant curriculum and teaching practices?

Theoretical Framework. In order to answer these questions, the data collected during the study was analyzed against a theoretical framework developed specifically for this investigation. The framework was based on Gloria Ladson-Billings' theory of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Geneva Gay's theory of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. The two theories have similar

goals, but slightly different foci. Culturally Relevant Pedagogy is defined as teaching that "empowers students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically by using cultural referents to impart knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Ladson-Billings, 1994). Culturally Responsive Pedagogy is defined as teaching that "validates, facilitates, liberates, and empowers ethnically diverse students by simultaneously cultivating their cultural integrity, individual abilities, and academic success" (Gay, 2010). Though the two theories have varying tenets, for the purpose of this investigation they are not understood as significantly different and will be referred to as one theoretical unit comprised of aspects of both theories -- Culturally Relevant/ Responsive Pedagogy (CR/RP). The framework also draws from several other contributors to the conversation around culture and teaching The following paragraphs detail the components of each theory that were combined to form the working framework for this study.

The foundation of this framework comes from the three pillars of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy developed by Gloria Ladson-Billings (1995) -- academic achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness. While Ladson-Billings' three pillars establish the goals of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, there are many different characteristics, conceptions, and components of teaching that work together to create a culturally relevant classroom. When analyzing the data from teacher interviews and classroom observations, I looked for evidence of the characteristics, conceptions, and components of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy that are rooted in Ladson-Billings' three pillars. An important part of a culturally relevant theoretical framework are the defining characteristics of culturally relevant teachers. In her book *The Dreamkeepers,* Ladson-Billings (2009) describes five non-negotiable characteristics of culturally relevant teachers. First, culturally relevant teachers are not 'color

blind' -- they do not ignore part of a student's identity that might help them better understand their educational needs, such as race, ethnicity, or culture (Ladson-Billings, p. 36). It is imperative that culturally relevant teachers do not dismiss or discount one of the most salient features of a child's identity (Ladson-Billings, p. 36). Teachers of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy have a high self-esteem as well as a high regard for others (Ladson-Billings, p. 37). Culturally relevant teachers believe in and respect their profession, their capabilities, and the capabilities of their students. On a similar note, culturally relevant teachers view teaching as an art form and themselves as artists (Ladson-Billings, p. 45). These teachers pursue their craft with passion and persistence, never following a 'recipe for results' and always looking to try new and creative ways to engage and educate their students (Ladson-Billings, p. 45).

Furthermore, culturally relevant teachers view themselves as part of the community that their students belong to and view teaching as a way of giving back to that community while encouraging their students to do the same (Ladson-Billings, p. 41). Finally, and most importantly, culturally relevant teachers believe that all students can succeed and are dedicated to finding ways to help their students be successful (Ladson-Billings, p. 48). It is important to note that just because a teacher possesses some or all of these characteristics does not mean that they employ culturally relevant practices. Culturally relevant teachers, however, do possess these qualities. When analyzing the interview and observation data, this portion of the theoretical framework will be used to determine if the teacher participants possess the characteristics indicative of a culturally relevant teacher.

In addition to the defining qualities of teachers, there are several other aspects of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy that are fundamental to achieving Ladson-Billings' three

foundational goals. First, Culturally Relevant Pedagogy requires a very specific view and understanding of the student-teacher relationship. In Ladson-Billings' *The Dreamkeepers,* a culturally responsive student-teacher relationship is described as fluid and 'humanely equitable' (2009). Instead of acting as the ultimate authority with a one track mind, culturally relevant teachers allow their roles in the classroom to flow from one to another so that students can experience learning as a teacher, leader, etc. (Ladson-Billings, p. 66). Another characteristic of this relationship is its cultivation beyond the classroom (Ladson-Billings, p. 67). Culturally relevant teachers create other opportunities to interact with and 'teach' their students beyond regular school hours by serving as girl scout leaders or Little League coaches, organizing 'lunch bunches', inviting them to church, etc. (Ladson-Billings, p. 68-71). Culturally relevant teachers capitalize on any chance they can to positively impact the lives of their students.

The second concept tied directly to achieving Ladson-Billings' three goals of academic achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness is a very distinct view of knowledge. Ladson-Billings' (1995) first revealed the culturally relevant understanding of knowledge in her introduction to the theory, but elaborated on them in *The Dreamkeepers* (2009), which is used to discuss them here. First, knowledge is viewed as something that is continuously recreated, recycled, and shared rather than being static, unchanging, and single directional (Ladson-Billings, p. 89). In this case, students and teachers work together to build knowledge and learn from each other, especially by acknowledging the abundant knowledge that students bring with them into the classroom (Ladson-Billings, p. 95). Second, culturally relevant teaching views knowledge critically by setting it up to be challenged and assessed from all angles before accepted or rejected (Ladson-Billings, p. 100). In culturally relevant classrooms knowledge is

not infallible and is no longer accepted out of habit, obligation, etc. -- culturally relevant "teachers and [their] students engage in a collective struggle against the status quo" (Ladson-Billings, p. 127). Culturally relevant teaching also requires a passion for knowledge, not a commitment to memorizing facts or figures (Ladson-Billings, p. 104). Culturally relevant teaching is excited and enthusiastic about the construction of knowledge and its relationship to their students (Ladson-Billings, p. 103). This understanding of knowledge is crucial to the success of tactics through which CRP is carried out.

Aside from the defining qualities of teachers outlined by Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, the teaching practices related to a successful classroom relationship between culture and teaching have specific characteristics. Geneva Gay (2010) indicates six characteristics that are present in Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. Culturally Responsive Pedagogy is validating -- it legitimizes the cultural heritage and lived experiences of students and uses that capital to denounce stereotypes, breed acceptance and grow knowledge (Gay, p. 31). This characteristic links positive self-concepts in students to improved academic achievement (Gay, p. 32). Second, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy is comprehensive -- it "teaches the whole child" by developing students intellectually, socially, emotionally, and politically (Gay, p. 32). Culturally Responsive Pedagogy is multidimensional -- it pervades all aspects of the educational environment and makes students responsible for a variety of things besides just 'learning' (Gay, p. 33). Culturally Responsive Pedagogy is found in curriculum content, classroom management, instructional techniques, etc. and creates a new job description for students which demands that they are responsible for knowing, thinking, questioning, analyzing, feeling, reflecting, sharing and acting (Gay, p. 33-34).

Additionally, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy is empowering -- it creates a structured environment where students believe that they can be successful and are inspired to pursue their goals until they are achieved (Gay, p. 34). Culturally Responsive Pedagogy is transformative -- it defies the conventions of traditional education by making academic success non-negotiable and accessible through the recognition and utilization of students' existing strengths and accomplishments (Gay, p. 36). Finally, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy is emancipatory -- it liberates students from the constraints of mainstream notions and provides psychological freedom that allows them to focus on their academic pursuits (Gay, p. 37). Like the culturally relevant teacher characteristics, the presence of one of these culturally responsive qualities in a classroom environment does not automatically make that classroom culturally responsive. Culturally responsive classrooms, however, possess these characteristics and evidence of these characteristics will be looked for during the data analysis of participant interviews and classroom observations.

Gay's theory of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy also addresses the student-teacher relationship and the necessity of culturally responsive caring (2010). In this relationship, teachers care *for* and not just *about* the personal well-being and academic success of each student (Gay, p. 48). Teachers actively engage in honoring and respecting their students as both students and people in an attempt to positively affect their education and lives (Gay, p. 48). It is impossible for a teacher to achieve the goals of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy if a connectedness is not established between him or herself and each student. The student-teacher relationship is the foundation off of which all of the practices of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy are based -- if

this foundation is not solid and deeply rooted, the teachers' efforts to employ Culturally Responsive Pedagogy are not likely to take hold.

After discussing the basic characteristics of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, as well as some of their fundamental conceptions, it is necessary to include some tactical components that typically appear in classrooms where CR/RP is being executed. These components come from Gay (2010) and Ladson-Billings' (2009) theoretical writings as well as other contributors to the academic conversation surrounding culture and teaching. One of the most instituted practices in a culturally relevant or responsive classroom is the development of a community of learners. The creation of a community of learners appeals to students' needs for a sense of belonging and develops their ability to work with others to achieve common goals (Gay, 2010, p. 33). Culturally relevant/responsive classrooms implement cooperative learning groups so that students develop both individual and group responsibility and accountability and recognize the positive correlation between gains in knowledge of the individual and gains in knowledge of the community (Nagel, 2008, p. 365).

Another strategy linked to CR/RP and Ladson-Billings' foundational pillars is the idea of instructional scaffolding, where a students' existing experiences, knowledge, and skills are used to help them develop knew knowledge (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 135). Teaching to and through a student's "community cultural wealth" builds bridges connecting their lived experiences to classroom instruction, aiding in the effective development of new knowledge and skills (Chenowith, 2014, p. 39; Gay, 2010, p. 31; Yosso, 2005). Including students' lived experiences as part of the 'official curriculum' legitimizes their existing knowledge and helps them move from what they know to what they need to know (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 127, 134).

Perhaps the most important strategy implemented in culturally relevant/responsive classrooms is the establishment of explicit and high expectations and standards, as well as the development of supportive structures for success (Gay, 2010, p. 56). Setting non-negotiable goals for academic success, as well as social and emotional development, encourages students to rise to meet these standards (Gay, 2010, p. 46). When students are treated as competent, they are likely to demonstrate competence; therefore, teachers create structures through which students can achieve what they are each truly capable of, rather than teaching to the 'lowest common denominator' (Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. 134). Other common culturally relevant/responsive classroom strategies include creating classroom environments that mirror students' familiar community and family structures (Howard, 2001), making use of 'purpose' to inspire academic and personal growth in students (Milner, 2014), reconceptualizing disciplinary methods (Busey & Russell, 2016; Brown, 2004), and teacher adoption of a warm demander identity (Ware, 2006; Bondy & Davis, 2000). Using the theoretical framework indicated above, the data sets will be examined to determine whether the teacher participants are seeking to achieve the three pillars of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy through the tenets of the culturally relevant/responsive characteristics, conceptions, and components discussed above.

Overview of Thesis. Chapter 1 established my role and purpose as the researcher and laid the groundwork for why and how this thesis came into being. This chapter also established relevancy for this topic and documented why this study is necessary at this moment in time. Chapter 1 also introduced the research questions for the study and defined the theoretical framework that will be used during data analysis. Now an overview of the remainder of the thesis is provided as a guide to the rest of the project.

Chapter Two contains my Literature Review in which I discuss the current conversation around Culturally Relevant/Responsive Pedagogy by grouping the literature that I found under themes that emerged during this review. Themes may include: high school, middle school, teacher experience, urban schools, inservice teacher preparation, etc. Under each theme, I summarize the literature that pertains to this theme and what it contributes to the conversation around Culturally Relevant/Responsive Pedagogy. After discussing the themes that emerged during my review, I make suggestions about gaps in the literature that I discovered. I elaborate on these gaps, such as rural and elementary education, and make an argument for their inclusion in this conversation. This portion of the Literature Review points towards my research questions and provides support for the necessity and relevance of this project.

Chapter Three includes the Overview of Methodology and the Overview of Methods. The Overview of Methodology describes my use of a qualitative case study and the means through which it is carried out. For this project, my research methods include two semi-structured interviews with each teacher, three-four classroom observations, and data analysis. The purpose of the first interview was to gather general information about the participants' background as teachers. The second was a follow up interview to discuss classroom observations and other themes related to findings from the literature review, such as the teachers' experiences with culture and teaching and their definitions and understanding of Culturally Relevant/ Responsive Pedagogy. Classroom observations occurred three-four times per teacher for 60-90 minutes each. Classroom observations consist of field notes pertaining to the curriculum and pedagogical enactments of the teachers that I am observing. Finally, I conducted data analysis that focuses on themes related to the theoretical framework and emergent themes from the data

itself. The Overview of Methods discusses the research setting, participants, recruiting, positionality, data collection, data analysis, establishing trustworthiness, etc.

Chapters Four, Five, and Six consist of my findings for and analysis of each teacher and a summary of those findings. In these sections, I take the information that I have gathered from the interviews and classroom visits and analyze it within the theoretical framework established in Chapter One. It is here that I determine whether or not the participating teachers employ culturally relevant/responsive curriculum and pedagogy and examine why or how they may have come to use the teaching practices that they do.

Chapter Seven consists of my Conclusion and Implications. In this section I draw conclusions based on my findings, discuss any implications that my findings might have on the larger conversation surrounding Culturally Responsive/Relevant Pedagogy, and provide recommendations for how the teachers might adapt their curriculum and teaching style to better foster cultural growth and understanding in their classrooms. Following Chapter Seven will be an Appendix and References.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

The research on Culturally Responsive/Relevant Pedagogy is extensive, therefore this review focuses on literature with issues salient to the following key criteria used in the search: culturally responsive pedagogy/teaching, culturally relevant pedagogy/teaching, teachers/ teaching, literacy, social studies, urban, rural, elementary school, middle school, high school, teacher training, teacher perception, teacher experience. The researched discussed is limited to those topics because of the scope and purpose of the project, which is to understand the Culturally Relevant/Responsive Pedagogy in the context of a rural school district. In order to discuss the academic conversation relevant to my study, the literature has been grouped according to four themes that emerged upon review of the literature. These themes are organized around key considerations that emerged surrounding the setting and place of implementation (Theme 1: CR/RP in urban school context, Theme 2: CR/RP in middle and high school classrooms) as well as the teachers who implement or attempt to implement CR/RP (Theme 3: CR/RP and teacher training, Theme 4: CR/RP and teacher perception).

Theme 1: CR/RP in an urban school context. A number of scholars have documented the implementation of Culturally Relevant/Responsive Pedagogy in urban classrooms. In his study, Brown (2004) interviewed thirteen teachers in urban classrooms across the United States in order to determine whether their classroom management styles reflected Culturally Relevant Teaching. His findings described five strategies that emerged among the teachers that contain themes of Culturally Responsive Teaching, such as creating communities of learners and establishing clear and enforced expectations (p. 276, 282). The teachers that Brown interviewed varied in their levels of experience in the classroom. The different experience levels of the teachers and the

varied responses received about their management styles raised questions for Brown about whether preservice or inservice teacher training "can prepare teachers to respond in culturally responsive ways through their chosen management strategies to the needs of urban students" (p. 286).

In a case study assessing the effects of culturally responsive teachers' pedagogy on urban, low-income students' interpretations of different themes in US history, Epstein, Mayorga, and Nelson (2011) found that Culturally Responsive Teaching had positive effects on "students' understanding on the role of racial groups and racism in US history and society," but did not create more understanding about the diversity of experiences of whites (p. 15). This study raised questions about the effectiveness of culturally responsive teaching when it is only coming from one teacher among many, and how the effectiveness of culturally responsive teachers might be impacted by the "physical, political and cultural contexts in which the students lived" (p. 16). In this case, the urban setting of the studied classroom had a significant effect on the students' perception and understanding of history themes and attempts at Culturally Responsive Pedagogy.

Howard's (2001) study focused on student perception and interpretation of teacher practices that model Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. Seventeen urban elementary school students were interviewed in order to gain insight on teaching practices from a viewpoint that is rarely considered (p. 136). The participants shared their thoughts about four different teachers who had been recognized as culturally relevant educators within urban contexts (p. 131). From the student interviews, three central themes emerged regarding the teachers' practices -- importance of caring, establishment of a community/family-type environment, and presenting education as entertainment (p. 136). The study included significant amounts of specific commentary from the

students that revealed their positive reactions to these methods of teaching that, unsurprisingly, fall in line with culturally relevant methods. While the use of all three of the themes seemed to have a positive effect on students in these teachers' classrooms, students in the study were especially insistent that "making learning a fun and exciting process" made a "significant difference in their levels of interest, engagement, and overall achievement" (p. 144-145). The study also listed several specific strategies that teachers can use to develop culturally relevant practices in urban classrooms within the three categories discussed in this study (p. 146).

In a study regarding the implementation of culturally responsive teaching through warm demander pedagogy, Ware (2006) examined the attempts of these practices to create a climate of achievement for students of color in urban classroom settings. The study found that the intersection of cultural/racial identity, warm demander pedagogy, and culturally responsive teaching creates a foundation of support for academic development that led to the cultivation of a culture of achievement among urban, African American students (p. 452). While these studies (Brown, 2004; Epstein, Mayorga, and Nelson, 2011; Howard, 2001; Ware, 2006) are not an exhaustive representation of the work done on culturally responsive pedagogy in urban settings, they provide evidence of the focus of CRP research on urban schools, regardless of the intent or findings of the individual studies.

Theme 2: CR/RP in middle and high school classrooms. Considerable efforts have been put into examining the response of students to Culturally Responsive Pedagogy at the middle and high school level, especially in history and literacy classes. For example, Busey & Russell (2016) examined the perceptions of middle school Latino students on Social Studies and discussed the experiences of these students' that influenced those perceptions. The study found

several common themes among the students' perceptions, including the presence of "banking pedagogy" that limits student engagement with the material, lack of cultural diversity in the curriculum, and a need for current and global perspectives (p. 9-11). In response to these findings, Busey and Russell suggested ways for teachers to turn the idea of cultural responsiveness in teaching into an everyday practice through incorporating student backgrounds, altering disciplinary methods, and including global and current events (p. 14).

Howard (2002) also examined student perceptions and understandings of their learning environments. In one case study, Howard used semi-structured interviews to learn about secondary students' general perceptions about school and how they felt about the degree of effectiveness of their teacher's pedagogy (p. 429). Through these interviews and classroom observations, Howard found that three strategies described by the students seemed to have an overall positive effect on student effort, engagement, and achievement (p. 425). Culturally connected classroom environments, caring, and communication are all components of Culturally Relevant Teaching that helped increase overall student achievement (p. 431). Like the Busey & Russell (2016) study, Howard's research takes a student centered approach in order to learn more about how middle and high school students are affected by their teachers and classrooms from their own perspectives.

Student centered studies (Busey & Russell, 2016; Howard, 2002) are crucial to the research on CR/RP because they give students a voice in the conversation. Martell's practitioner research study (2013) also examined secondary history students' perceptions of what classroom practices and subject matter were helpful or hindering when it came to learning about history. Through surveys and interviews of students of color, Martell found that his attempts to use

Culturally Relevant Pedagogy did have a positive impact on some aspects of their learning and achievement (p. 65). Martell also examined his Whiteness and ability to understand the racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds of his students in order to better empower his students of color through a curriculum that they can connect to (p. 81). Teacher self-examination is an important component of Culturally Relevant Teaching that allows for teachers to move beyond their conscious or unconscious biases and develop practices and curriculum that focus on the real capabilities of their middle and high school students instead of their perceived incapabilities.

While several studies revealed positive changes in social studies classrooms that can be achieved through the implementation of Culturally Relevant/Responsive Pedagogy (Busey & Russell, 2016; Howard, 2002; Martell, 2013), Nagel's (2008) research on cooperative learning in secondary social studies classrooms showed the impact that one specific approach aligned with CR/RP had on students. This study discussed the five essential elements of cooperative learning, especially noting the importance of establishing individual and group accountability (p. 365). The study also made suggestions for implementing these kind of learning opportunities in Social Studies classrooms by utilizing 'talking chips', 'round table' exercises, and other techniques (p. 365). Additionally, Nagel's research discusses how pre-service teachers can be better equipped to teach through a mindset of cooperative learning, rather than lecturing students in such a way that simply mimics the methods through which they were taught (p. 366).

Nagel's research looked closely at cooperative learning, a tactic tied to CR/RP, and its impact on students. A study done by Milner (2014), however, examined culturally relevant teaching in middle school social studies classrooms from a more wholistic viewpoint. Through classroom and school observations and teacher interviews, Milner evaluated 'purposeful

teaching' as an added dimension of cultural relevance that pervades classroom practices and motivates student achievement by emphasizing purpose (p. 16). This research demonstrated a movement away from the common attitude of 'fixing' students towards helping them find purpose in their learning and their lives (p. 9). Milner's case study offered support for the idea that the instructional practices of teachers can serve as the difference-maker in a classroom and makes the case for the necessity of introducing alternative ways of teaching that emphasize the development of skills and knowledge beyond what can be measured on a standardized evaluation (p. 16).

Like Milner, Chenowith (2014) promoted emphasizing and building off of skills and knowledge that students have outside of what can be measured on a standardized test. In a study that examined cultural scaffolding in literacy education in the context of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, Chenowith found that in order for curriculum to be effective for middle and high school students it must affirm their lived experiences (p. 39). Chenowith discussed the uses of ethno-autobiographical writing as a means of teaching literacy while helping students interpret and understand their cultural identities as well as the identities of others (p. 38). This study defined culturally responsive literacy instruction as teaching that provides opportunities for academic achievement by making connections between the classroom and the world of the student (p. 37). Affirming and utilizing the cultural capital that students bring with them into the classroom is an important part of Culturally Responsive Teaching.

Lopez's case study (2011) examined critical literacy as part of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in secondary classrooms through performance poetry. This research described critical literacy as a practical expression of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and mapped out ways in

which teachers can enact these kind of teaching methods in their own classrooms (p. 78). Lopez's study emphasized the increasing diversity of student populations in North America and, like many other studies (Milner, 2014; Chenowith, 2014), it advocated for the inclusion of experiences of students of color in order to promote the academic success of all students (p. 90). Finally, Lopez's research raised questions about the sustainability of Culturally Relevant Pedagogy and recognized the importance of support and collaboration when it comes to maintaining this kind of teaching style (p. 90). CR/RP is not something that a single individual can execute in isolation. In order for CR/RP to be sustainable, it requires a network of support.

Theme 3: CR/RP and teacher training. Sometimes, these networks of support are developed through preservice and inservice teacher trainings that emphasize Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. Research has been undertaken that shows evidence of the communities built among teachers as they undergo preservice and inservice education and development that prepare them for Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. In a study conducted by Wenger and Dinsmore (2005), the researchers addressed assumptions about student diversity in rural areas and discuss the internalization of those assumptions. The study discussed what the teachers viewed as the most effective training exercises when it came to preparing to teach diverse students, such as exposure to minority communities and resources and sustained individual contact with minority children and parents (p. 7). For the cohort studied, the Community Cultural Exploration was the most helpful training exercise because it allowed them to reflect on their own funds of knowledge while also seeking out new funds of knowledge (p. 10). Studies like Wenger and Dinsmore's (2005) provided evidence that building support networks within training

programs and the community helps teachers sustain their CR/RP practices when they are in the classroom.

Another body of literature surrounding preservice and inservice teacher training concerns self-efficacy and attitudes in regards to Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. While Wenger and Dinsmore (2005) focused their research on teacher training techniques in preparation for teaching diverse student populations, Frye, Button, Kelly & Button (2010) assessed the beliefs of teacher candidates about their ability to execute culturally responsive strategies and achieve academic success in their students. This study examined the teachers' beliefs about their self-efficacy regarding their ability to provide instruction that would meet the needs of a diverse student population prior to and following their participation in a methods class with a focus on Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (p. 12). The study found that the teacher candidates' belief in their ability to achieve positive outcomes through Culturally Responsive Pedagogy improved over the course of the semester (p. 19). With these documented increases in self-efficacy comes the hope that teachers who undergo these kinds of methods courses will implement culturally responsive strategies in their own classrooms.

Like Frye, Button, Kelly & Button (2010), Fitchett, Starker & Salyers (2012) discussed culturally responsive self-efficacy in preservice teachers. In this study, the researchers examined the relationship between an "innovative culturally responsive teaching model in a social studies methods course and teacher candidates' culturally responsive teaching self efficacy" (p. 585). Their findings suggested that CR/RP methods programs in preservice training can boost teacher candidates' confidence to teach diverse students (p. 602). Furthermore, the study found that preservice programs with CR/RP themes can "counteract latent bias and stigmatization of white

practitioners toward working with diverse student populations," making PSTs more effective when their cultural identity is not mirrored in the demographic makeup of their classroom population (p. 602). Additionally, this study raised questions about different pathways for teacher licensure and how those differences might affect preservice teachers' attitudes of CR/RP self-efficacy (p. 603). Developing efficacy amongst preservice teachers when it comes to culturally responsive strategies is an important step in the process of implementing Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in classrooms and it would be beneficial to determine what training and licensure pathways lead to the most successful outcomes.

One way that feelings of teacher self-efficacy can be boosted in regards to CR/RP is by giving teachers opportunities to have empathetic experiences in order to promote multicultural awareness, as shown by Gunn & King (2013). This study gathered both qualitative and quantitative data about twenty preservice teachers who participated in teaching cases and then shared their reactions to the issues in the cases through first person narrative writing (p. 176). The study also used the Cultural Diversity Awareness Inventory (CDAI) developed by Gertrude Henry to assess the teaching candidates' attitudes toward culturally diverse students before and after the teaching cases and writing exercises (p. 177). The results of the CDAI after the cases and narrative exercises showed a shift in the attitudes of the preservice teachers' towards advocacy for students (p. 180). The change in the CDAI scores of the participants was statistically significant enough to suggest that using an empathetic lens that promotes personal identification with diversity issues can help lead to the development of culturally responsive traits in preservice teachers (p. 181).

Theme 4: CR/RP and teacher perception. While the literature surrounding preservice and inservice CR/RP training focuses on teachers' perceived self-efficacy and ability, another part of the academic conversation examines teacher perception of CR/RP itself. In a study conducted by Davis, Espositio & Swain (2011), seven urban educators noted that while they recognized that CRP empowered their African American students academically, socially, and emotionally, the strict nature of the school reform models (SRM) enforced at their schools impeded the implementation of culturally relevant pedagogy. The study revealed that the teachers faced "mental and financial stress" when they attempted to adapt the SRM lessons to best fit their students' needs in the style of CPR (p. 249). The study consisted exclusively of interviews with the teachers in order to keep the focus on their perception of CR/RP and its relationship with SRM. This phenomenological study of these seven teachers likely speaks to the experience of a wider audience of teachers who feel oppressed and demoralized when they try to implement CR/RP curriculum and teaching strategies in districts with rigid SRMs (p. 238). For some teachers under these restrictions, CR/RP may be perceived as a fruitless undertaking or more of a burden than it is worth. Sleeter (2012) notes that some reforms make it professionally and legally risky to implement CR/RP practices that conflict with the mandated curriculum (p. 577). Additionally, the study noted that the teachers see the "disconnect between policymakers and reformers and the realities of urban schools" and how CR/RP is dismissed or ignored even though there is evidence of the positive impact of effectively implemented CR/RP on closing the achievement gap (p. 238).

Even when strict school reform models aren't hindering the implementation of CR/RP, studies like the one conducted by Young (2010) show that both preservice and inservice teachers

have difficulty implementing CR/RP in their classrooms (p. 248). Within the qualitative study, all of the facets of data collection revealed teacher confusion when it came to understanding CR/RP, with the biggest concern being the exclusion of 'academic success' as part of their definition of CR/RP (p. 252). Young's study revealed a disconnect between the knowledge of CR/RP theory and practical application of the concepts, so the second part of the study consisted of Young working as a co-researcher with eight members of a school's leadership team to turn culturally relevant theories into pedagogical tools (p. 250). The study called attention to the idea that "the void in scholarly research is not in the knowledge of theories but in the knowledge of how to implement them, particularly in a way that has a wide-reaching and sustainable impact on teacher education" (p. 259). This study revealed that even if the school environment is primed for CR/RP, it is not guaranteed that teachers who try to implement these practices will succeed. If teacher perception of what CR/RP fundamentally is does not align with the foundations of the theory, whatever is implemented by the teachers will not truly be culturally responsive.

Like Young (2010), Fasching-Varner & Seriki (2012) addressed the fact that while some teachers are claiming to use CRP they are not in fact "connecting to the foundation of the practice" (p. 2). In their response to Hayes & Juarez's (2012) "There is no culturally responsive teaching here," Fasching-Varner & Seriki (2012) noted that many teachers are invoking the practice of CRP without a clear vision of what should be informing that practice (p. 2). Therefore, the strategies and curriculum that many teachers are implementing under the guise of CR/RP aren't fundamentally connected to the theory at all. One of the most interesting comments that Fasching-Varner & Seriki (2012) made is that the attitude necessary to teach with CR/RP cannot be taught, and therefore many teachers are failing to practically implement CR/RP

because there is a disconnect between the theory of CR/RP and how teachers articulate what they believe to be culturally relevant (p. 2). In other words, the theory of CR/RP and teacher perception of what CR/RP is are not always synonymous.

While Young (2010) and Fashing-Varner & Seriki (2012) revealed the broad causes behind the difficulty of implementing CR/RP, Hyland (2009) discussed one specific cause. Hyland (2009) conducted a case study that observed and interviewed one teacher and found that her commitment to CR/RP was "hindered by her struggle to develop meaningful connection to the home community of her...students" (p. 95). While the teacher's classroom practices reflected the tenets of CR/RP, she could not find a way to bring those practices into her relationship with the community (p. 107). Though the observed teacher made a significant effort to teach in the manner of CR/RP, her inability to understand the importance to developing relationships within the community creates problems for the success of her implementation of CR/RP. In Hyland's study, the teacher's perception of CR/RP did not grant significance to implementation of CR/RP outside of the classroom setting.

Across this review of the literature on Culturally Relevant/Responsive Pedagogy, a variety of issues and perspectives that are incredibly important to the development of cultural relevance and responsiveness as common classroom objectives appeared. In this review of the literature, several key considerations emerged regarding CR/RP in K-12 schooling and became the defining and structural themes of this review. First, many studies (Brown, 2004; Epstein, Mayorga, and Nelson, 2011; Ware, 2006) focus on the implementation of *Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in urban classrooms*. The subjects of the research vary in grade level and subject area content, but the findings provide evidence of the success of aspects of CR/RP when it comes to

promoting academic achievement and cultural understanding in diverse student populations (notably in urban schools).

Second, a significant part of the conversation around culture and teaching within the scope of this review concerns the implementation of *Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in middle and high school classrooms* (Busey & Russell, 2016; Howard, 2002; Martell, 2013; Nagel, 2008; Milner, 2014; Chenowith, 2014; Lopez, 2011). Within these grade levels, the focus is on CR/RP in social studies and literacy classrooms. The major draw from these studies is the idea that no matter what grade or subject is being taught, it is the duty of the teacher to connect the students' lived experiences to the academic experiences of the classroom in order to promote achievement and development in many areas.

Additionally, the literature around Culturally Relevant/Responsive Pedagogy narrows in on the training that preservice and inservice teachers receive in preparation for teaching culturally diverse student populations. Several studies provide evidence for the idea that teacher self-efficacy when it comes to CR/RP can be improved through participation in methods courses that employ structures of CRP (Wenger & Dinsmore, 2005; Frye, Button, Kelly & Button, 2010; Fitchett, Starker & Salyers, 2012). Increasing teacher belief in their ability to effectively execute instruction that reaches all students helps promote the implementation of CR/RP in classrooms. Training and exercises that give teachers the opportunity to empathize with issues salient with those of CR/RP have also proven to be effective in promoting the development of CR/RP traits in teachers (Gunn & King, 2015).

Finally, a body of literature surrounding teacher perception of Culturally Relevant/ Responsive Pedagogy exists and shows how this perception can be influenced (Davis, Esposito

& Swain, 2011; Sleeter, 2012). Several studies provide evidence of a disconnect between the foundational concepts of CR/RP theory and practical application of the theory (Young, 2010; Hyland, 2009) as well as a disconnect between CR/RP and teacher perception of CR/RP (Fasching-Varner & Seriki, 2012). Ensuring that teacher perception of what CR/RP is matches the theoretical grounding of CR/RP is essential if the theory is to be effectively translated into successful practical application.

In reviewing the current research surrounding Culturally Relevant/Responsive Pedagogy and examining the themes that emerge, it is apparent that there are several gaps in the academic conversation regarding Culturally Relevant/Responsive Pedagogy. The existing research disproportionately neglects rural schools and communities while focusing on culture and teaching in urban areas. There is undoubtedly a need for research on CR/RP in urban school settings, but increasing cultural diversity among school age populations in rural areas makes it especially necessary to examine the intersection of culture and teaching in rural settings as well. This project specifically and intentionally focuses on CR/RP in a rural school district in order to understand more thoroughly the ideas surrounding the perception and implementation of CR/RP in rural schools.

Aside from failing to address circumstances in rural classrooms, the existing literature about culture and teaching examined in this review is primarily concerned with middle and high school classrooms. Just as urban classrooms are an important part, but not the entirety of, the conversation, solely examining CR/RP in secondary classrooms does not provide exhaustive knowledge on the subject. It is important, especially in today's rapidly globalizing world, that students be exposed at a young age to classroom learning that promotes sociopolitical

consciousness and affirms students' cultural identities. Elementary school classrooms are an important component of CR/RP research that has yet to be thoroughly investigated. This project focuses on teachers in fourth and fifth grade classrooms in an effort to include the relationship between elementary school classrooms and CR/RP in the academic conversation surrounding culture and teaching.

The final area where existing research is lacking is in the evaluation of the role of teacher experiences on their perception and implementation of Culturally Relevant/Responsive Pedagogy. There is extensive research on teacher preparation and training programs, but very little conversation surrounding the way that a teachers' lived experiences influence their interest in or ability to execute culturally responsive strategies. Just as it is important to understand students' lived experiences in order to draw connections between their world and the classroom, it is important to understand teachers' experiences with culture and the influence that they have on their teaching strategies and curriculum decisions. This project includes teacher interviews that reveal the connections between the teachers' lived experiences and their understanding and use of CR/RP.

These holes in the academic conversation create an opening for a research study that addresses the neglected issues of rural, elementary, and teacher experience in the context of Culturally Relevant/Responsive Pedagogy. In this study, culture and teaching are examined in fourth and fifth grade literacy and social studies classrooms in a rural school district, with emphasis on the way that teacher experiences shape their relationship with CR/RP strategies. This study will use the existing body of literature to aid in analysis of the findings while also discussing new observations and implications for the future.

Chapter Three: Methods & Methodology

Overview of Methodology

This project was conducted as a qualitative case study in order to gather information regarding teacher experience and the intersection of culture and teaching in rural Texas schools. A qualitative approach was selected because of its nature to promote understanding rather than the quantitative tendency to seek data for causal explanation (Stake, 1995). Qualitative research has an underlying psychological thread of intentionality to it that explanation-oriented quantitative research does not -- a component which is important to the intentions of this research (Stake, 1995). Qualitative research also relies on personal interpretation of noninterventionist observations and judgments in the field by the researcher (Stake, 1995). Finally, qualitative research takes a discovery approach to knowledge, rather than the quantitative reliance on knowledge construction (Stake, 1995). In the end, qualitative case study was chosen because this methodology seeks to understand the human experience rather than identify a cause and effect relationship (Stake, 1995).

In *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry* (2008), edited by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln, Robert Stake writes about the qualitative case study. A case is a functioning specific, such as a factory worker or a series of tropical storms, and the study is the process of inquiry about the case as well as the product of the inquiry (Stake, p. 136). Case study can be intrinsic or instrumental, depending on the end goals of the researcher. This research study was conducted as an intrinsic case study because the interest is in the development of better understanding in regards to the particular case, not in theory building or efforts of generalization (Stake, p. 136). Cases are a complex entity that operate within a number of contexts and must be studied

holistically in order to foster the qualitative understanding of these complexities (Stake, p. 141). The foundational characteristics of a case study are as follows: case studies have a conceptual structure and are often organized around a small number of research questions or issues that draw attention to ordinary experience (Stake, p. 142); data patterns are sought through subjective observation and other means in order to develop the issues (Stake, p. 155); triangulation through the redundancy of data gathering and analysis is used to reduce the misinterpretation of findings when they are translated from researcher to reader (Stake, p. 148); assertions and generalizations are developed about the particular case (Stake, p. 155). In summary, the case study represents the particular case, rather than the world, with the methods of this kind of research focused on disciplining personal and particularized experience (Stake, p. 156).

Setting and Participants

The research setting included three elementary schools in Treeport Independent School District where the participants teach (Armstrong Elementary, Baker Elementary, and Boyd Elementary). Armstrong Elementary is located in an upper middle class neighborhood on the southern side of the district. Baker Elementary is located on a main road in North Treeport, a low-income area of the district. Boyd Elementary is located in a middle to upper middle class neighborhood. The location of the three schools does not seem to dictate the student population that the campuses serve. The campuses were selected based on their service to diverse demographic populations of fourth and fifth grade students. Data collection during interviews occurred in a private setting at the teachers' respective schools and observations occurred in each teachers' classroom. Data analysis and writing took place in Austin -- either on the UT campus or at my home.

The participants were recruited by a combined effort of myself, the District Superintendent and the eligible campus principals. I contacted the Superintendent via email to provide information and guidelines for the study and the needed participants. The Superintendent then contacted the campus principals and provided them with the necessary information for participant selection. Each principal at the three eligible campuses selected one teacher to participate in the study. Teachers were chosen based on the provided participant criteria as well as willingness to participate and interest in the study topic. Once the teachers were selected, the Superintendent notified me of their selection and gave me the contact information for each participant. From there, I reached to out each participant via email to make arrangements for the interviews and classroom observations.

The participants include three teachers from the target population. The target population includes teachers, either male or female and of any racial/ethnic background, ages 20-70 years old, who currently teach fourth or fifth grade social studies or literacy in TISD. The participants were selected from elementary schools that have diverse student populations. The selected participants are three women of Caucasian descent, ages 30-70, who teach at three different elementary schools in the district. Sharon Foster, 51, teaches reading and social studies to fourth graders at Armstrong Elementary. Carolyn Grant, 67, teaches reading and social studies to Gifted and Talented fifth graders at Baker Elementary. Amy Williams, 33, teaches reading and language arts to fifth graders at Boyd Elementary.

Data Collection

This research project is an intrinsic qualitative case study of three participants which drew from the following data: two semi-structured in-person interviews with each participant and four classroom observations per teacher.

Interviews. The interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed, and took place privately in the teacher's classroom. The purpose of the first interview was to gather general information about the participants' background as teachers. The focus was on gaining basic knowledge about their experiences as educators. Prompts such as the following were included: Why did you decide to become a teacher? Describe your approach to teaching. What is your experience with education in a rural setting? etc. The initial interview lasted approximately 30 minutes. The second interview was a follow up to discuss classroom observations and other themes related to findings from the literature review. The focus was on the participants' understanding and awareness of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy as well as questions that arose during observations. Prompts such as the following were included: What are your experiences with cultural identity, student learning and achievement, and societal and community inequalities? Do you think it is important to consider these factors in relation to your students when making decisions about what to teach and how to teach? What does culturally responsive teaching mean to you? What barriers keep teachers from enacting this pedagogy in their classroom?, etc. The second interview lasted approximately one hour.

Observations. The second form of data collection, classroom observations, occurred four times per teacher for 60-90 minutes each (or the time it takes to complete a lesson). Classroom observations were recorded as field notes pertaining to the curriculum and pedagogical

enactments of the teachers observed, as well as the atmosphere of the classroom and learning environment. My field notes were divided into two sections: 1) where I recorded the actual activities and occurrences observed in the classroom and 2) where I recorded thoughts or ideas that I had pertaining to these observations while in the classroom. Within 24 hours of the observation I will wrote up the field notes more formally and elaborated on the thoughts that I had while I was in the classroom in order to preserve the accuracy and detail of the observation. The classes and times selected for observation were based on teacher and researcher availability and the length of the available observation period. When I was in the classroom, the teachers made their students aware of my presence as a researcher and observer.

Data Analysis

Finally, I conducted data analysis that focused on themes related to the theoretical framework, key considerations from the literature review, and emergent themes from the data itself. Data analysis occurred in several phases. The first phase was an inductive approach where I conducted a line by line reading and coding of my field notes and transcribed interviews based on emergent themes from the data itself (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The second phase was a deductive coding of my field notes and transcribed interviews based on themes from the theoretical framework of this study (Miles & Huberman, 1994). This theoretical framework was developed from the compiled research and findings of several academic authorities on CR/RP as well as other contributors to the conversation surrounding culture and teaching. Using Gloria Ladson-Billings three pillars of academic achievement, cultural competence, and sociopolitical consciousness, this study's framework also indicates the characteristics, conceptions, and components of a culturally relevant/responsive teacher or classroom. Characteristics include

those of both the teacher and the teaching practices themselves. Culturally relevant/responsive teachers are not 'color blind' and they involved in the community around them. Furthermore, CR/RP is validating, comprehensive, empowering, transformative, empowering and emancipatory. Important concepts of CR/RP are the student-teacher relationship and the conception of knowledge. Components of culturally relevant/responsive classrooms include a community of learners, instructional scaffolding, explicit and high expectations, and several other structures. The fundamental pillars as well as the characteristics, concepts, and components, were used to analyze the data collected from interviews and observations.

The third phase of data analysis consisted of the collapsing of codes in order to use the collected data to address the research questions guiding this study: How do fourth and fifth grade social studies and literacy teachers approach their curriculum in the context of culturally relevant pedagogy? How do the teachers' past experiences with culture and teaching influence their curriculum and teaching practices? How does working in a rural school district affect the teachers' inclusion of culturally relevant curriculum and teaching practices? In order to best address these guiding thoughts, I used another series of questions related to the theoretical framework to aid in the analysis of the data. These questions include: What evidence of the CR/RP pillars was found in the classroom observations or interview transcriptions? What evidence of CR/RP characteristics, conceptions, or components was found in the classroom observations or interview transcriptions? What attitude did the participants hold towards CR/RP, as evidenced in their observations or interviews?, etc. These questions were used to draw out the relevant parts of the data that respond to the research questions.

Establishing Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness for this study was established for the categories of credibility, confirmability, and dependability through several practices. Credibility of the findings was established through triangulation of data, where multiple methods were used to validate the results of the study before they are analyzed and listed as findings. Triangulation occurred across multiple participants and sources of data. Confirmability was established through thick description of the data. Evidence for all findings was well documented and easily accessible in order to confirm that the findings come specifically from the data collected during this study. Finally, dependability of this study was provided by the detailed inclusion of the methods and processes of this study that make it possible to duplicate in the same or similar setting. Finally, if requested by the participants, member checking of data will be allowed in order for participants to ensure that their words or actions have not been misunderstood or misrepresented.

Positionality

Though I grew up in Treeport, Texas and attended TISD schools, I did not attend the schools participating in the study and was never taught by the participating teachers. Treeport is my home, however, and my connection to this town and its unique setting are what drew me to conduct my research here. I received a great education from the TISD schools that I attended, but as a student I wasn't able to observe or understand my teachers and classroom environment in an academically critical way. I enjoyed my classes and was successful in school, and therefore felt that the school had given me its best. Now, as a researcher removed from the first person experience as a classroom student, I have an opportunity to critically examine whether Treeport schools are really giving their best to their students.

As I reflect on my experiences in Treeport ISD, I realize that it was easy for it to appear that the school and its teachers were giving me their best because I was an upper middle class, heterosexual, white female from an intact family who had all of the support and resources necessary for her success. The reality is that most students in TISD are not in the same circumstances as I was and therefore need more from the schools and their teachers. To make things more interesting, Treeport is in the middle of rural Deep East Texas and with a population of 35,000, sits as the largest town for nearly one hundred miles. The added layer of rural challenges in Treeport made the idea of studying the intersection of culture and teaching in this district even more intriguing.

In conducting this study, I sought to determine whether there was evidence of understanding of or implementation of Culturally Relevant/Responsive Pedagogy in this rural district. Once data collection and analysis was complete, I was able to leave the participating teachers with ideas on how to better serve their students. Treeport, Tx is near and dear to me, and at the end of the day I want the entire community to benefit from this study. That being said, however, as a researcher I have bound myself to objective observation and committed myself to being conscious of my biases and diligent in removing them from my analysis. As much as I wanted to find evidence of CR/RP here, it was more important to uncover the truth and use that as a foundation for moving forward.

Chapter 4: Sharon Foster

Teacher Profile & Background Information

Sharon Foster invited me into her classroom for our first interview with a smile and an eye roll as she laughed about the day she'd had in fourth grade. As we sat and talked that afternoon, and again a few weeks later, I developed an understanding of who Foster is and what she holds dear. She's as good-natured as they come, deeply rooted in her Christian faith, and quick to embrace the humor of every day life. Slender, brunette, and middle aged, Foster has the aura of a no-nonsense mom who doesn't play around, but has a lot of love to give.

I started off by asking Foster why she decided to become a teacher. She laughed before explaining that she began college as an accounting major (because of the money), but realized by her second semester that all she wanted to do was work with kids. Foster told me that she had always enjoyed kids, it just took her a little while to understand that she wanted to make a career out of it. And she did just that. Foster has been teaching in rural Texas schools for 27 years, starting in Brookings where she taught reading and language arts to fourth, fifth and sixth graders for two years. She then taught a combined seven years in Dover, transitioning from fifth to fourth grade, before returning to the town where she was born and raised, Treeport, Tx. Foster has been teaching reading and social studies to fourth graders at Armstrong Elementary in Treeport ISD since 1998.

When asked to 'identify' herself racially, socially, culturally, economically, etc., Foster laughed a little, uncertain of what exactly I was asking. After some prompting, Foster identified herself as a heterosexual, Caucasian female. She's been married to her husband for 33 years and they have three grown children and two grandchildren. Foster shared that she did not come from

money growing up and was the only member of her family to graduate from college. Foster recognizes herself as the biggest 'breadwinner' in her family (on a teacher's salary) and says that she still views her socioeconomic status as low-middle to middle income, the same as when she was growing up in Treeport.

Foster's hesitation to expound on her 'identity' suggested that this concept was not something that she spent time reflecting on. As we continued talking, it became even more apparent that intense self-reflection is not something that Foster regularly engages in or is even comfortable considering. The more I came to know Foster through our series of interviews, the more I came to understand that her conception of identity and her inability to view it critically stemmed from the way her personal identity was formed by the small, insular community that she was socialized in. After graduating from college, Foster came home to the rural community where she was born and raised -- and to be sure, there is nothing wrong with returning to your roots. In Foster's case, however, the rural Deep East Texas community that she immersed herself in did not promote the development of a nuanced word view or self-aware perspectives. The narrow way that the world has been constructed for Foster not only impacts the way that she views herself, but also the way that she understands race, inequality, and difference. These concepts, as they pertain to Foster's teaching, are discussed in more detail later in the chapter.

When talking about her training as a teacher, Foster hinted that her most valuable teacher-education came after she had her own classroom and could really see what worked on a daily basis. She assured me that she learned a lot in college, but that the real, practical knowledge didn't come until she "got in there." Foster also attributed a lot of her training to her mentor teachers, as well as good and bad inservices alike. Over the years she's developed a proficiency

for compiling what she's learned from other teachers along with techniques and strategies she's drawn from different resources to form a teaching method that works for her students. Though Foster admitted that she wished she had gone back to school to earn her master's degree when she was younger, she seemed content with where life has taken her and smiled when she told me that all she ever wanted was to be in the classroom.

A big part of Foster's story, and the purpose she finds in teaching, is her Christian faith. She believes that God brought her into teaching and placed her in her school and classroom to reach the unchurched through her relationship with her students. Though Foster's religious beliefs are never aggressive or overbearing in the classroom, this added faith dimension influences the way that she perceives her students and her role in their lives. Several of the themes that emerged from Foster's interview and observation data regarding her understanding of the role of a teacher, student capability and achievement, and the student-teacher relationship are grounded in her Christian beliefs.

Foster has spent her entire teaching career in rural Deep East Texas schools, and her experiences speak to the increasing diversity of student populations in these communities. When she was teaching in Dover ISD in the early 1990s, her involvement with a largely Hispanic population motivated her to gain her ESL certification, which she has renewed every year since then. Since returning to Treeport ISD in 1998, she has seen the student population in her school shift to become roughly one-third African American, one-third Caucasian, and one-third Hispanic. Her ESL certification continued to prove beneficial in this setting, but in recent years it has become priceless. During this conversation, Foster pointed out that ESL in Texas doesn't just apply to Hispanic students any more. In the last few years, Foster has taught students from

Burma who came to her school speaking practically no English. Whether it's diversity of culture or diversity of socio-economic status, Foster's school, Armstrong Elementary, certainly has plenty of 'difference' to go around. Foster's experiences with diverse student populations in a rural setting draw attention to the reality that Texas' rural schools, as well as rural schools across the country, are not as simple or homogenous as they are often made out to be in comparison to urban student populations.

Anyone who knows Sharon Foster can attest to her kind nature and gentle spirit. A self-proclaimed introvert, she is patient and tender with her students, even though she drives a hard bargain in the classroom. She loves her students dearly and is quick to remind you of that after she fusses just a little about what one of them said or did that day. Brought up in Treeport, Foster returned here to build her life and raise her family, and there is no doubt that she is proud to have done so. She is fiercely loyal to her school, steadfast in her viewpoints, and content with her way of life.

Description of Classroom Setting

The first time I observed Sharon Foster's class, I knocked on the door, and after receiving no answer, opened it a crack to see what was going on inside. Foster was leaning over a group of desks deep in conversation with some students. When she saw me in the doorway she waved me in, introduced me to the class, and sat me at her desk in the back of the room. As soon she got me settled in and I assured her I had everything I needed, Foster went right back to bustling about the classroom. The students were changing classes and I took that brief interruption as an opportunity to take in the classroom environment.

The room was bright and happy, filled to the brim with students and desks and stuff, but not overcrowded. Foster had placed a teaching desk at the front-center of the classroom and the student desks, gathered in groups of four, spread out from there. On the far side of the room was a low table with three student computers and the back corner housed a U-shaped table. I sat in the back-center at Foster's desk (which she said she never uses) and to my right were the backpack hooks and a shelf holding buckets of neatly distributed school supplies. The final corner was occupied by a bookshelf stuffed with a wide variety of reading material. The usual classroom-style whiteboards lined two of the walls, and a ceiling mounted projector and screen were visible from my vantage point. The most noticeable thing about the classroom was the lack of unused wall space. Foster had covered the walls with book jackets sorted by genre, handmade posters and charts of reading comprehension strategies, student projects, etc. A large 'daily agenda' poster covered a portion of the side wall whiteboard, and on it Foster had written the day, date, and the day's itinerary.

I do not know what I had expected to find when I walked into her fourth grade reading classroom, but I was gloriously taken aback by the sheer amount of literature that I encountered. Everywhere I turned the walls were covered in posters that described "poetry", "classics", "biographies", etc. and the book jackets attached to the walls brought a nice dimension of accessibility to the idea of reading. Aside from the wall decor, books could be found throughout the room -- books on shelves, books in stacks, books on desks. Everywhere you looked there were more and more books. You can gather a lot about a teacher from the classroom that they build for themselves, and Sharon Foster has built one that reflects her love for reading and her desire to share that with her students.

Findings: Emergent Themes Related to Culturally Relevant/Responsive Pedagogy

Several themes emerged from the data from Foster's responses during our interviews and my observations during my time in her classroom. Some of these themes were prompted by specific questions intentionally selected to initiate a discussion about topics related to my theoretical framework, and some simply came into being from things she shared and things I witnessed. The themes discussed in this chapter are specific to Foster's thoughts and convictions, and are, as to be expected, exceptionally entwined and interrelated.

Foster believes that status as a 'rural' area indicates a low level of wealth in the community that negatively correlates with the achieved level of education in the parents of her students. When analyzing the data from Foster's interviews and observations, one of the first concepts that began to emerge was her understanding of the relationship between education and rural communities. In Foster's experience, students in rural communities seem to have less educated parents. She feels that the "education of the parents [in non-rural areas] is probably higher than some of the education of the parents that we have in rural areas because we don't have as much money here" (Int. Trans., 1/27/17). Foster associates that lack of education with the low-socioeconomic status of most of her students, reasoning that their lack of money indicates lack of higher level education in the parents. These comments suggested that Foster understands the presence of less money in the community as both a cause of the lower levels of parent education and an effect. Her thoughts on this subject led us to an interesting conversation about the role of parents in education, from which another important theme in this data emerged.

Foster believes that the parents of students in rural communities have low levels of involvement in the education of their children. In her opinion, there seem to be many reasons for

why this is the case, but they ultimately all stem from the significant presence of low-socioeconomic status (SES) families in Treeport ISD. Foster notes that some of her students' parents want to be involved and are often in contact with her via text messaging and phone calls, but are unable to provide sufficient support at home because of the work schedule that they have to maintain in order to provide for their family. She pointed out that some parents are more than willing to help their students, but are unable to understand or complete the assignments that come home, much less explain them to their children. Foster explained how "education has really stepped up and [parents] may not know how to do the things that we send home," especially when it comes to activities that require higher level critical thinking skills (Int. Trans., 1/27/127). In some cases, Foster notices that parents simply won't help, regardless of whether they are able to or not.

Disappointment was written all over her face when she told me about the parents that she has encountered who simply don't value school and "just look at it as a babysitting service in a way" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Foster says that she does the best she can to communicate with parents and help them think of ways to keep their student stay on the right track, but she notices an extreme disparity between the conversations she has with parents and what actually happens at home. She told me how badly she wished parents would get involved more, but acknowledged that she has no control over what goes on at home and resignedly admitted that "that's just the way it is" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17).

The deficit lens through which Foster views her students' parents stems from her understanding of involvement and participation that shaped her worldview (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Foster has a narrow understanding of parent involvement and support, and when the

parents do not meet her specific criteria she is quick to write them off. Foster lacks a nuanced view of the roles or abilities of her students' parents and does not explore alternative funds of knowledge within the parents from which she or her students might benefit (González, 2005). Foster's restrictive expectations and limited perspective only allows her to see the shortcomings of her students' parents, rather than honoring their abilities and offerings. Literature strongly cautions teachers against this deficit worldview because it does not promote the culturally responsive tendencies of affirmation, emancipation, or comprehension (Gay, 2010**)**. Foster's beliefs about parental support in her district also influence they way that she understands student academic capability, motivation, and achievement.

Though she has a deficit understanding of her students' background, Foster believes that all students are capable of learning, even if in different ways or times. She does her best to make her students aware of all the opportunities that they can have in life and encourages them to have dreams and goals. She is aware of the differences in ability of her students and recognizes that they are capable of different things in their own way. Foster doesn't pretend that all of her students are able to learn in the same way at the same time, but she is sure to emphasize that every student *can* learn. She does her best to convey this belief to her students and help them understand why each student has different goals. In observing Foster's classroom, I witnessed her praise two students who expressed their capability in different ways with the same enthusiasm. Each student came to her desk to have their Accelerated Reading folder checked -- one student had completed her goal of four larger chapter books and another student had achieved his goal of one small chapter book (Field. Obs., 2/127/17). Foster honored each students' achievement (though they were vastly different) with equal sincerity and encouraged

them to keep up the good work. Foster understands what her students are capable of on an individual basis. She celebrates them when they achieve their goals, no matter how small, and encourages them to set bigger expectations for themselves. It's here that her faith comes into play, as she explains to her students that "we're all created differently, so that's why our goals are different, but we're all going to achieve to the top of our goal" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Foster expects her students to exceed what they believe they can do. She reconciles these beliefs about student capability and what her students produce in terms of academic achievement with her understanding of student motivation.

Foster understands student motivation as the disparity between her beliefs about student capability and what she witnesses in terms of student achievement. Foster believes that her students' home environments impact their ability and drive to be successful. She perceives that the work ethic modeled for her students by their parents is low, and that it affects the attitude that students bring with them into the classroom. Foster says that when she knows that certain students are not getting the academic support or accountability that they need at home, she finds someone at the school to step in to help fill that role. For example, one student has his assignments signed by the school principal, when necessary, because the parents are not "parenting the child" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). When Foster recognizes these kinds of situations, she does her best to implement structures to help compensate for the lack of support at home. Additionally, Foster believes in setting specific goals for each student in order to motivate them toward success. She understands what each of her students is capable of, what they have achieved in the past, and what kind of structures that they need to succeed. Based on this understanding, Foster helps students set goals that are bigger than what they believe that they can

do so that students have something exciting to live into. She strives to make them "think they can be something" and then "make them be something," an approach that speaks to her deficit understanding of her students' lives and circumstances (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Foster's understanding of her students' motivation influences they way that she understands and promotes their achievement.

Foster believes that student achievement hinges on the effort that students put into their education as well as the support structures that she implements based on her understanding of their needs. Foster assigns her students grades based on how they handle their responsibilities when it comes to completing their work or practicing their skills. For example, she allows her students to correct their assignments for a passing grade of 70, but is unwavering in her rule that "if they miss their corrections or don't pay attention and correct them when we are doing it together," they don't get the better grade (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Foster told me plainly that her students "get what they earn" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Though Foster is strict when it comes to holding students accountable for their own achievement, she does everything she can to help them achieve their goals. While observing Foster's classroom, I witnessed a conversation that she had with a student about difficulties he was having achieving his AR goal. Foster asked the child if he was doing his thirty minutes of reading each night (a time allotment that Foster later told me would more than cover each child's basic goal for the period) (Field Obs., 1/27/17). When the student admitted that he wasn't, Foster asked if she needed to call his parents to discuss the situation and the child said no. Foster reminded the student that he was the only one who could turn his behavior and achievement around. Foster works to remind her students that they have to take responsibility for their work, while providing structures in school to help them

achieve their goals. On several occasions Foster allowed her students to have individual reading time at school so that she could supervise and promote their goal achievement.

Foster's perception of the level of parental support in her school also influences the way she handles things in her classroom. She understands the immense workload that her students are dealing with in other subjects, so she tries to "give these kids class time to do everything so that all they have to do at home is read 30 minutes and maybe a correction" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Foster believes that many of her students' parents can't or won't help them with their assignments at home, so she sets aside class time for them to complete their work in an environment where they can get the support they need. Additionally, Foster pointed out that a good relationship with each kid is the most important factor of student achievement. She stands by the belief that "you have to foster a relationship with the kids in order for them to want to perform for you and want to do well" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Foster has tremendous respect for the student-teacher relationship and the way that she views this bond manifests itself in all aspects of her teaching.

Foster believes that the student-teacher relationship is the foundation for everything that she hopes to achieve in the classroom. Foster makes it a priority to learn everything that she can about her students, in and outside of the classroom. She is focused on knowing the whole child -- their background, their home life and circumstances, their families, their culture, etc. In order to teach well and fulfill the role that she feels that she has been called into, Foster believes that it is necessary to "love and care for our kids", "respect our kids," and "understand and listen to them" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). She said that she tries to think about where her students live and makes an effort to go by and visit when she can because "you learn a lot by going to their houses

and knowing their siblings and knowing what they come from" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Foster, however, does not feel like she can connect to all of her students because of their dissimilar backgrounds, a barrier to her implementation of CR/RP that will be discussed later.

It was obvious to me that Foster recognized the importance of spending time with her students after school, but, when prompted, she cited several things that keep her from pursuing this element of the student-teacher relationship as much as she'd like. First, Foster noted that her parents did not model a strong sense of community involvement for her when she was growing up. That disconnect, combined with her tendency to be more quiet and reserved, makes her feel that she is "not as involved as [she] could be in the community" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17).

Foster also blamed increasingly strict liability laws that keep teachers from spending more time with students. She remembers a time when she could "keep a kid after school and go work with him a little bit and go run him home," but said that teachers no longer have those options. Even with these limitations, Foster does everything in her power to be genuinely interested in her students and show them that she is interested. She firmly believes that the student-teacher relationship is the "most important thing you have in order to get a kid to work for you and to learn" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Foster says that without that genuine, individual connection, "you are going to have a wall" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). The way that Foster understands and perceives difference in her students and her classroom affects the ways that she she works to break down that wall.

Foster understands and recognizes difference outside of race and culture. When I asked Foster whether she would consider herself 'colorblind' when it comes to her students, she said that she doesn't even look at race in her classroom anymore. Rather, she feels that understanding

her students' skill levels, home situations, daily lives, needs, and struggles is "a lot more important than the color of [their] skin" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Foster told me that she just doesn't pay attention to race because she believes that each child is an individual, and she does whatever she needs to do for that kid. Foster's concentration on what characterizes her students outside of race is an important component of teaching the whole child, but her 'colorblind ideology' makes her (and others with the same perspective) an enabler of the status quo (Bonilla-Silva, 2010). In her discussion of how operates in three elementary schools, Amanda Lewis (2001) writes that holding a 'color-blind ideology' allows one to "avoid confronting the racial realities that surround them, to avoid facing their own racist presumptions and understandings, and to avoid dealing with racist events" (p. 801). In an attempt to remove race from her classroom by working through a color-blind lens, Foster discounts the "racialness" of her own existence and the important role that race and ethnicity play in the "institutions, neighborhoods, and communities" around her (p. 803). Foster's detachment from race in the classroom further reveals her discomfort with reflecting on her own racial identity and the identities of her students.

During this conversation, Foster seemed unable to distinguish stereotypical racial profiling from considering how the race of each student affects them individually. I think Foster was quick to say that she did not see race in order to squash any idea that she might be racist in her classroom. Foster's beliefs about the identities of her students, however, suggest that she is working against what she understands to be racist by refusing to categorize students simply based on what they look like (Pollock, 2004). Based on Foster's statements and her overall attitude toward her students, I believe that she does take race into consideration on an individual basis when learning about each child. It is interesting to note, however, that Foster is more

attuned to differences rooted in race and culture when it is something that she is not familiar with. She felt like she was apt to "probably pay more attention" to a culture that she is not as familiar with (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). In her case, Foster has taught a "bazillion" African American students, and therefore does not see the nuances of their race or culture, but rather focuses her resources on understanding "who doesn't have money", "who needs help with getting food on the weekend", "who struggles" etc. (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Foster sees all of these different aspects of her students' lives and is quick to note how they affect their motivation and achievement in the classroom, but is slow to acknowledge them as 'inequalities'.

Foster's understanding of social inequality is practical rather than conceptual. Foster understands that there are specific things in the lives of each of her students that negatively affect or limit their ability to succeed, but she admits that she doesn't see "all the inequalities that a lot of people are saying are out there" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Foster deals with a lot of low-income families and she feels that people view low-SES or joblessness as an inequality, but her experiences speak to laziness and lack of work ethic. Foster is much more inclined to be sympathetic to parents who are working and doing the best that they can, yet still can't pay the bills. Foster explained that she takes all of these factors into consideration and does everything that she can to help each of her students, but she refuses to write parents "free passes" based on what she perceives to be self-inflicted inequalities.

Foster's understanding of social inequality stems from the ideologies that inform her world view. In this case, dysconscious racism and classism is the interpretation of social reality that is most consistent with Foster's experience (King, 1991). Dysconsciousness is the practice of uncritically holding "perceptions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs that [justify] inequality

and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given" (p. 135). This distorted way of thinking does not allow Foster to be critically conscious of racial and social inequity and promotes "culturally sanctioned assumptions...that justify the social and economic advantages White people have" (p. 135). Foster is in no way blind to the different advantages and disadvantages that her students come to school with, but she seemed to be unable to recognize or connect them to the bigger societal, historical, and institutional inequalities that these things stem from. Her assessment of social inequalities colors her perception and understanding of Culturally Responsive/Relevant pedagogy.

Foster's Understanding of Culturally Relevant/Responsive Pedagogy

During our second interview, Foster told me that she was not familiar with the concept of Culturally Responsive/Relevant Pedagogy. I provided her with a short paragraph that summarized the main tenets of Culturally Responsive and Relevant Pedagogy, with special emphasis on the pillars of academic achievement, sociopolitical consciousness, and cultural competence as well as constructing a community of learners and viewing knowledge critically Foster was immediately drawn to the concept of establishing a community of learners, noting some ways that she does and could include that in her teaching, and we discussed examples of this tenet that I had observed in her class. During one of my classroom visits, Foster had students work in their table groups (about 4 students) to read about the heroes of the Alamo and pick out important facts about their assigned historical figure (Field Obs., 1/27/17). Then, each table group came to the front of the room where the table captain presented the information that the group had gathered about their hero to the rest of the class. If a group missed an important fact, Foster supplemented the group's presentation to make sure that the class received all of the

necessary information, but she gave each group the chance to be the experts on their topic before stepping in. When the activity was over, Foster pointed out to the class that they had worked together to teach and learn from each other. I witnessed learning exercises similar to this activity on multiple occasions in Foster's classroom, where evidence of collaboration and group work was strong, but an element of critical engagement was lacking. It is true that the students worked together to complete the Alamo assignment, however, they were not prompted to and did not actively participate in a critical analysis of the information that they discovered or develop any new knowledge to go along with it.

As we continued the conversation, Foster said that the idea of viewing knowledge critically is something that she feels unable to effectively to convey to her class, saying that "I know it's above their head, I know it is" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17) Foster also struggled to deeply grasp the concepts of sociopolitical consciousness and cultural competence. She noted that she steers clear of politics in her classroom, but felt that she was trying to introduce cultural competence. Foster said that she tries to bring in elements of other cultures when she can, but it seems to only go as deep as discussing different kinds of food or traditions associated with the culture. Foster implements a superficial approach to address multicultural themes in her classroom (Sleeter & Grant, 1988). She acknowledged that she certainly wasn't as thorough in this area as the theory encouraged, but that she felt she was doing what she could. Foster's lack of familiarity, and even lack of comfort, with these concepts helped to explain what she understood to be barriers against teaching in a way that reflects the doctrine of Culturally Relevant/Responsive Pedagogy.

Foster saw her reluctance to include politics or politically charged topics in the classroom as one of her biggest barriers to teaching in the style of Culturally Relevant/Responsive Pedagogy. She mentioned that she is "afraid to bring up politics in the classroom" and believes that her students are too young to understand "a whole bunch of political stuff" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Aside from what she perceived to be limited capability to understand sociopolitical issues, Foster recognized that, at this age, her students simply mirror their parents' beliefs and cling to "what's right to them" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Foster doesn't just note the potential for lack of understanding on her students' part as a barrier to Culturally Relevant/Responsive Pedagogy -- she also cites her own lack of understanding in several areas, as well as the lack of understanding of many teachers in situations similar to hers.

I directly asked Foster what she thought the biggest barrier to Culturally Responsive/ Relevant Pedagogy was, and she replied that it was "just not knowing" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). This idea of 'not knowing' takes two forms. First, Foster was not familiar with most of the concepts that I outlined for her as part of Culturally Responsive/Relevant Pedagogy, and she viewed this lack of basic understanding and familiarity with the tenets as a barrier to implementing CR/RP. She noted that if teachers don't have a foundational knowledge of the components of Culturally Responsive/Relevant Pedagogy and an understanding of the "expectations of each one of these qualities", you can't expect them to integrate them fully into their teaching style (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Some teachers use these strategies in their classroom, without ever 'learning' about them, simply because that is what makes the most sense to them when it comes to meeting their students' needs. In order for these ideas to become more universally integrated, however, it is imperative that all teachers are made aware of these

constructs. Along with basic knowledge of the theories and more complete understanding of each pillar, Foster pointed out that she would need practical steps for implementing these strategies in and outside of the classroom. Foster agreed that Culturally Responsive/Relevant Pedagogy sounds like a great way to approach educating her students, but she was quick to point out the wide gap that lies between the desire to teach in this manner and "the reality of doing it" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). It seems that Foster would only be willing to implement CR/RP if she had a step-by-step guide to follow (Bartolome, 1994).

Foster also cited more personal limitations in regards to what might inhibit her ability to implement Culturally Relevant/Responsive Pedagogy. Foster felt that, based on her life experiences and what she has been exposed to, she did not know enough about other cultures to be able to teach about them well. She believes that her personal background does not lend itself well to this kind of teaching because she doesn't feel like she has a foundation for experiencing or cultivating difference. She tied this feeling of inadequacy back to the barrier of knowledge, noting again that "it's hard to teach what you don't know" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Foster not only admitted that she does not feel confident in her knowledge of other cultures and her ability to integrate that into her teaching style, but also confessed that she doesn't view herself as a 'cultured' person. She explained that she felt her limited exposure to opportunities outside of the rural area around Treeport ISD makes it difficult for her to include certain things in her curriculum because of her lack of personal understanding. Additionally, Foster does not seem to think that she could adequately access or develop her existing knowledge of these topics either, saying that it "would be a hard thing to ever learn all of" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). A combination of

knowledge and understanding, in several different forms, seem to constitute the majority of the barriers that Foster sees to teaching in a Culturally Responsive/Relevant manner.

Foster mentioned a lack of resources as a final barrier to implementing Culturally Relevant/Responsive Pedagogy. During our second interview, when asked what role she believed resources played in the implementation of Culturally Relevant/Responsive Pedagogy, she focused her attention on resources in the form of time and money. Foster noted that the 8am-3pm school day is only part of her job -- everything that that goes into planning for the next day, the next week, happens outside of that. And in Foster's mind, teaching in a culturally relevant/ responsive way would require additional preparation each day. Foster's kids are grown now, but she recognizes how difficult it is to balance your family life at home with the time you need to set aside to prepare for school. She suggests that older teachers may be more prone to teach in a culturally relevant/responsive way than teachers with young families, simply because the former have more time to devote to planning.

Foster also notes money as a resource that may dictate her ability to implement CR/RP. She assured me that her school "works really hard to try to get us the things we need," and she feels that she can be "successful with what [I] have" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). As we talked more about what CR/RP entails in and out of the classroom, however, Foster pointed out several areas where lack of financial resources might limit her, or any teacher's, ability to effectively implement CR/RP. Foster said that her school, and the students in her school, cannot afford to pay for school trips that would give them the opportunity to experience things outside of their limited world views. Additionally, Foster recognizes that she does not have the funds (or time) to engage with her students outside of the classroom as much as she would like. She told me that

she frequently thinks about picking up a student and taking them to see a movie or to attend church with her, but she doesn't have the ability to do that for every student, and therefor does not believe it would be right to do it for a few. Whether funding realistically plays a significant role in the effective implementation of Culturally Relevant/Responsive Pedagogy, Foster understands it as a possible barrier to her ability to fully employ these strategies.

Summary of Findings

Sharon Foster is thoughtful and kind, a straight-laced traditional teacher with a strong moral conscience and a warm demeanor. Her classroom reflects her love for reading and the drive she has to help her students love reading too. Through a series of interviews and classroom observations I learned more about Foster's teaching philosophy and her perception and understanding of the components that constitute CR/RP.

Foster views the low level of wealth that she sees in her students' lives as a symptom of the rural community that they live in. She believes that the low-socioeconomic status of many of her students' families impacts the parents' ability or desire to be involved in the education of their children. Even though Foster positions some parents as simply incapable of providing the support that their students' need at home, she wholeheartedly believes that all students are capable of learning, even if it is in different ways or at different times. She also assumes that the motivation that her students see modeled at home has an impact on student capability and academic achievement. In order to bridge the gap between her understanding of student capability and what she witnesses in terms of student achievement, Foster does her best to implement support structures at school based on each students' individual needs.

At the forefront of all of Foster's beliefs about education, her strongest conviction lies in the idea that a strong student-teacher relationship is the only thing that can break down the walls that students put up. She believes that it is the most important thing that a teacher can develop if they want the student to learn. Foster does everything in her power to be genuinely interested and involved in the lives of her students, but she can do more. Foster also understands that the needs of her students are varied and complex. Her understanding of difference focused on the challenges that her students' face every day -- their skill level, home situations, needs, struggles, etc. -- rather than their race or culture. While Foster claimed that she is 'color-blind' in the classroom because she has taught "a bazillion" African-American students, she failed to understand the importance of openly considering race and culture when it comes to educating a child. Foster appeared unable to differentiate stereotypical racial profiling from considering how the race and culture of each student affects them differently. Foster seemed wary to discuss how she understands difference in her students through the lens of race and culture for fear of being called 'racist'. Foster also has an incomplete understanding of social inequality. She is attuned to the specific things in the lives of each of her students that affect or limit their ability to succeed, but she is slow to recognizes them as social inequalities that stem from broad, systemic issues. The paradox of Foster's teaching philosophy is that she claims to work to know each of her students deeply, but refuses to see their racial identity as part of who they are.

Before this study, Foster was not aware of Culturally Relevant/Responsive Pedagogy. After our discussion of its main tenets, Foster made several observations regarding possible barriers or obstacles to teaching in this manner. Foster struggled to deeply grasp the meaning of sociopolitical consciousness in the context of CR/RP and expressed her fear of bringing up

politics in the classroom. She noted that, because of their young age, many of her students lack the ability to fully understand these kinds of topics, a perspective that is warned against in early childhood education (Adair, 2014). Foster also noted her own lack of understanding in some of these areas as a barrier to teaching in a culturally relevant/responsive way. Foster believes that it would be extremely difficult to educate in this manner without a complete and thorough knowledge of the components of CR/RP, an express understanding of the expectations for each of the qualities, and practical steps for applying these strategies in and out of the classroom. Foster also recognized personal limitations that serve as a barrier to implementing CR/RP in her classroom. She feels a sense of inadequacy when it comes to her experience with and understanding of difference and her ability to effectively teach her students about other cultures. Foster noted that she has had limited exposure to 'cultural' opportunities outside of the Treeport area, and therefor feels that her lack of understanding in certain areas affects what she is capable of teaching her students.

The final barrier that Foster and I discussed was lack of resources, in the form of both time and money. Foster agreed that implementing CR/RP would be incredibly beneficial for her students, but she was quick to point out all of the extra time of preparation it would take to come to a full understanding of these strategies and develop ways to integrate them into her classroom. She made it very clear that the 8am-3pm school day is just part of a teacher's job, and that their work day generally extends way into the evening hours. Foster noted that she is already sacrificing time with her own family to prepare for future lessons and can't imagine that there would be enough time in the day to support a fairly dramatic shift in her teaching style. Foster also mentioned the lack of financial resources as a possible barrier to effectively implementing

CR/RP. She promised me that her school works hard to provide all of the teachers with the things that they need to be successful in the classroom, but the district is unable to afford the extras, like sending students on field trips that would work to broaden their horizons. Foster also mentioned that her personal financial situation hinders her ability to do more for her students outside of the classroom setting. She talked about how much she would love to take each student to the movies or to church with her, but explained that since she is unable to do that for all of the students she felt that it wouldn't be fair to spend that extra time with just a few.

Foster provided several interesting insights into barriers that might limit her ability to effectively implement CR/RP, but her relationship with this theory extends beyond what she designated as possible obstacles. Foster is very concerned with the academic achievement of her students and does (what she considers to be) her best to understand and teach her students in a comprehensive manner. Unfortunately, the small, insular community that Foster was socialized in gave her a deficit lens through which she unconsciously views her students and their parents. If she hopes to successfully integrate CR/RP into her classroom, Foster must get away from this deficit mindset and devote herself to affirming and empowering both her students and their parents. In order to do this, Foster must come to terms with her tendency to avoid self-reflection and her unwillingness to confront race and culture in the classroom. Foster must address her propensity to stick to what is comfortable for her and recognize that seeking out discomfort is an essential part of CR/RP.

The notion of comfort is something that cropped up in many of Foster's responses, both stated and perceived. Foster openly told me that she was uncomfortable including politics and deep cultural analysis in her classroom because she felt that she was not qualified to do so and

that the content was not academically appropriate for her students. Foster must address her idea of comfort on several levels if she hopes to successfully integrate culturally responsiveness into her classroom. First, Foster must be willing to make herself uncomfortable. In order for her to develop a curriculum and teaching style that is transformative and empowering, Foster must delve into topics that she is not familiar with. Not only must she work to develop a deep and comprehensive understanding of sociopolitical consciousness and cultural competence, she must be willing to increase her self-awareness and commit herself to intensive and regular self-reflection. Lewis notes that "education works best when those experiences that shape and penetrate one's lived reality are jolted, unsettled and made the object of critical analysis" (Lewis, 2001, p. 804). If Foster cannot reflect on her own identity formation and the identity formation of her students, she cannot be a successfully engage in cultural responsiveness. Second, Foster has to be willing to stimulate her students outside of their comfort zones, or what she perceives to be their comfort zones. No student will experience exceptional growth if they are not challenged to think critically about complex issues. Foster must decide whether she is willing to make herself uncomfortable in these ways for her own sake, and for the sake of her students. If she is not, she will never be able to teach in the light of Culturally Relevant/Responsive Pedagogy.

Though Sharon Foster appears content to rest in what is comfortable, she feels fiercely devoted to her students. She believes that they are capable of anything they set their mind to, and she does everything in her power to implement structures to help them achieve these goals. She is a steadfast and reliable teacher and has given her best to the students of Armstrong Elementary for the last twenty years. She is not blind to the limitations that her students face, but she has a hard time recognizing the greater issues that their struggles stem from. Foster also has difficulty

recognizing how much she does have to offer in the way of her own experiences with difference and culture, and she allows this to curb her confidence in her ability to teach in a Culturally Responsive/Relevant manner. Sharon Foster is desperate to help her students in any way that she can, but she is overwhelmed by the need that she sees and her own feelings of inadequacy.

Chapter 5: Carolyn Grant

Teacher Profile & Background Information

Carolyn Grant met me in the front office on her way in from recess on the day of our first interview. As we walked through the halls of Baker Elementary, she told me that she has been in the same classroom for more than twelve years -- a room that she loves because it is in the back corner of the school where she is free to go about her business without people bothering her every five minutes. I laughed at what she said, but was able to gather a significant amount of information about Grant as a person from that one comment. For starters, she is dedicated to her school, to the subjects and students that she teaches, and to her way of doing things. Grant is not one to let others come in to tell her how to run her show, so she doesn't mind being a bit out of sight and out of mind. That being said, Grant is neither lazy nor indifferent when it comes to her job as an educator. Rather, she prefers the privacy because it allows her more focused and productive time with her students.

From the moment Grant started talking, I was intrigued by her seemingly dichotomous nature. As kind and gentle as any grandmother figure would be, Grant is a fierce advocate for her students and a staunch supporter of a more progressive education style. She is compassionate and understanding, but sets high standards for her students and expects them to strive to achieve them. Grant has been in the business of education for more than three decades, but she is constantly learning and growing both professionally and personally because of her role as a teacher. Grant exudes the aura of a benevolent leader -- one you don't want to disappoint, but trust to take care of you when things get rough. Such an interesting mix of tradition and nuance, could tell that Grant was going to be a fascinating participant.

As soon as Grant and I settled in to fifth-grader sized chairs at a work table in her classroom, I started peppering her with questions. First, I wanted to know how she came to be a teacher. Grant said that she began her college career as a Fashion Merchandising major, but after marrying a man from Treeport realized that there would be limited opportunities for her to put that degree to use in Deep East Texas. From there, a combination of things got Grant into teaching. Both her mother and grandmother were teachers, she had always been interested in teaching, and there was a teacher certification program only twenty-five miles away -- next thing she knew Grant had a Home Ec certification that went nicely with her Fashion Merchandising degree. That wasn't quite enough for Grant, so she continued on until she earned her K-8th certificate and was hired as a reading specialist. She admitted that she had no clue what she was doing when she took her first teaching job, but "once [she] got in the room, [she] was hooked" (Int. Trans., 1/26/17).

Over the course of her thirty-plus year teaching career (she stayed at home for twelve years while her children were young), Grant has taught a variety of subjects at three different schools (two public, one private). Grant began her teaching career as a Title I interventional reading specialist, but after three years she began teaching at the private school in Treeport where her children were enrolled. She was teaching second, third, and fourth grade language arts and science there when she was recruited to come and teach in the Gifted/Talented program at Baker Elementary. She began teaching third grade language arts at Baker, but eventually moved to fourth grade Texas history, and finally to fifth grade language arts and social studies, where she's been for more than a decade. Grant was hesitant to leave fourth grade because she loved integrated Texas history/language arts curriculum that she had created, but she was told that the

school needed her in fifth grade and for the last thirteen years teaching fifth grade at Baker has "really been a joy" (Int. Trans., 1/26/17).

In her time at three schools and across grade levels and subjects, Grant has had an assortment of experiences within the rural communities where she's taught. Her time at the private school in Treeport exposed her to a student population who came from socioeconomically advantaged homes where "almost everybody's parents was educated" (Int. Trans., 1/26/17). Because of the voluntary nature of enrollment in private schools, the parents of Grant's students were highly involved and supportive of their children's education. Grant said that "everybody wanted their children to have a good education, or they wouldn't have them [there]" (Int. Trans., 1/26/17). She had small classes (usually ten to twelve students), great support, access to beautiful facilities and good resources.

Grant made the switch back to public school around the time that her husband went back to earn another degree and her son was preparing for college because she knew she needed to make more money. Around the same time, Baker Elementary recruited her to join the G/T program and it was an opportunity that she couldn't pass up. Though Grant has thoroughly enjoyed her time at Baker, she recognizes the differences in resources, support, and experiences that come with teaching at a public school, especially in a rural district. At Baker, even within her gifted program, the demographic of the students is much more varied. They come from a broad spectrums of economic, cultural and education backgrounds. Though some of her students come from economically advantaged homes with highly educated parents, many of her students come from low-socioeconomic homes and have parents with low levels of education. Grant's gifted program at Baker is also a by-choice program, so she sees a relatively high level of parent

interest, support, and involvement. However, the level at which some parents are able to be involved is limited by their resources (time, money, etc.). Not only are the parents' resources limited in some ways, the overall resources that Grant has access to are limited. Unlike her seemingly boundless resources and support when she was teaching in private school, the funds and materials that she is allotted by the state are rarely supplemented by anyone but herself. It's no secret that Grant would like to have more money -- she's got big dreams when it comes to integrating technology and computers into her curriculum -- but she makes do with what she has and doesn't let her lack of resources hold her or her students back.

After hearing about Grant's journey to and through education over the last forty or so years, I was curious as to how her teacher education had influenced her conception and application of teaching. She told me that one of the most important things that she learned during her teacher education courses was that "very little had changed in education in the last 200 years" (Int. Trans., 1/26/17). Grant noted this as one of the biggest problems with education, that "we haven't really changed with the times" (Int. Trans., 1/26/17). She says that when she was trained as a teacher, the standard was to have the teacher talk and the students listen, a system she compared to a preacher and his congregation. In her preparation program, Grant was taught a lesson cycle that was teacher-centered and skill and drill heavy. Grant says that it's not a bad formula if you are going to do direct teaching, but after many years of following that prescription she began to see her role as a teacher in a new light.

These days, Grant views classroom education in the US a little differently. She recognizes the shortcomings of teacher-centered direct teaching and believes that teachers who serve as guides for their students are much more effective in the long run. Stepping away from skill and

drill and straight lecture takes willingness, effort and preparation on the part of the teacher, and Grant says that many educators just aren't willing to put forth that kind of effort in the classroom. Grant says that there just aren't "enough people who want to be in the classroom," people who genuinely want to put time and effort into the lives of kids (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Instead, Grant said that many people with education degrees take up other roles, "anything to get out of the classroom" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). She looked so disappointed and disheartened by this fact, so I quickly asked her another question to direct the conversation away from such a discouraging topic.

To round out our conversation about her background, I asked Grant to describe her personal identity and she was quick to characterize herself as female, White and intelligent. She asked me if that covered it and I prompted her to think along the lines of social and economic identity as well. Her next move was to describe her active role in the community as a participant in an assortment of organizations and activities and her membership in a "broad group of friends" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Grant also shared that she is fortunate to be economically secure and fairly advantaged, so much so that she doesn't have to teach, but "can quit and stay home when [she wants] to" (Int. Trans., 1/26/17). With a husband, two children, and five active grandchildren, Grant hinted that retirement may not be too far around the bend.

As we continued our conversation, it became very apparent that Grant spent a considerable amount of time reflecting on the identities of others, but little time examining her own identity. She is quick to promote the acknowledgment and appreciation of difference in experience, tradition, and belief, but seems to overlook the importance of self-examination. Her lack of intentional self-reflection does not seem to be greatly hindering her ability to recognize

and honor difference, however, it would certainly add another layer of understanding if she would take more time to reflect on her own experiences and identity formation.

Just as I was about to dive into another set of questions, Grant commandeered the conversation and brought the interview to an end because she could hear her students gathering in the hall outside of her class. Not one to waste a minute of valuable instructional time, she told me that we would have to pick up our interview later. As I watched Grant head over to the door to collect her students and bring them in for the afternoon period, I was struck by the idea that, after almost fifteen years in the same setting she was just as passionate, if not more, about raising up her students to be the best that they could be in all areas of life. Carolyn Grant is grandmotherly in all of the best ways -- compassionate and kind, fiercely protective, and always around. She's an advocate for her students and their education, a pillar of her community, and a sheer force to be reckoned with.

Description of Classroom Setting

On my first day of observation in Carolyn Grant's classroom, her students were giving presentations over their research projects, giving me the perfect opportunity to take stock of the classroom while keeping an ear trained on the presenter. At first glance, the room is airy and welcoming, filled with light and a cheerfulness that comes with a happily messy classroom. Grant had arranged a corner desk for herself in the back of the room and student desks grouped in fours and fives spread out between her and the door. A larger work table with several chairs occupied one corner of the room and a white board displaying class reminders and assignments stretched across the wall catty-corner. Later in the class Grant pointed to a door in the center of

one of the walls, identifying it as her ‘work closet’ and attributing some of the disarray of the classroom to a recent clean-out of its contents.

Even when students were working quietly at their desks, Grant’s room still seemed to be abustle with activity. Every stretch of wall was covered in posters and student work -- classroom rules, reading and writing strategies, projects, class pictures, etc. Two of the classroom walls had low shelves filled to the brim with books -- the shelves sagging in the middle from the sheer weight of literature that Grant had packed into her classroom. On top of the shelves were an assortment of student-made dioramas depicting literary characters and historical figures and from the ceiling hung several mobiles with similar content. The next time that I visited Grant’s classroom, an assortment of red, pink and white decorations had been added by the ‘decorating committee’ in anticipation of the upcoming Valentine’s Day celebration.

Grant’s classroom reflects the pride she has in her students, past and present. Aside from the many student projects on display, the wall behind Grant’s desk is covered in pictures of her with former students who have long since left her class and gone on to bigger and better things. Above the white board are class pictures dating back to some of Grant’s earliest days at Baker and stretching to her most recent fifth grade graduates. She is quick to share with me what her students have accomplished, both in and outside of the classroom, and the many gifts and trinkets scattered throughout the room show that her students through the years adore her just as much as she adores them.

Findings: Emergent Themes Related to Culturally Relevant/Responsive Pedagogy

In analyzing Grant’s responses during our several interviews as well as my observations of her classroom, several themes emerged from the data that are worth detailing below. Some of

these themes were intentionally drawn out from specific questions I asked in relation to my theoretical framework, while the others emerged from the direction that Grant steered the conversation and the happenings I observed in her classroom. The themes discussed below are specific to Grant's experience and are an intricately interwoven tale of her understanding.

Grant believes that all students are capable of learning and honors that in them by "teaching up" to each student. She firmly believes that all children have an individual intelligence that should be celebrated and fostered, not ignored or diminished. She sets high goals and standards for her students and teaches them with those ends in mind. Grant is quick to say that education is not one-size-fits-all -- she understands that her overall goals as a teacher (to develop her students academically and personally) must be achieved through different means based on the needs of each of her students. Grant works to find a of balance of "things that are challenging" and "things that reinforce students," but always approaches her teaching in a way that ensures that her students know that she believes that "they're smart and that they can learn" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17).

Reading is Grant's passion, and she "makes sure that everybody reads" in order to grow this ability in her students (Int. Trans., 1/26/17). Her motto, "learn to read, now read to learn" is written in each student's reading journal and Grant bases her teaching off of that mantra every day. (Int. Trans., 1/26/17). Grant's fifth graders cover a wide range of reading ability, but she is able to recognize that difference in ability without compromising her belief in their capability. Grant also doesn't let reading tests or other formulas dictate what her students are capable of achieving. Grant uses the Accelerated Reading program to track her students' progress, but she doesn't let the suggested reading levels restrict her students' opportunities to challenge

themselves. She is aware of her students' minimum reading level and won't let them dip below that, but she always allows them to challenge themselves above their level. She refuses to put limits on her students' ability -- instead, she says that "if you can't read it after the first chapter, bring it back and we'll get another one" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). She'd rather her students try and learn from their attempt than never push themselves at all. Grant feels that it's not her job to tell her students what they aren't capable of. Rather, it's her responsibility to support them when they do challenge themselves and to help them find different ways to be successful if their attempt doesn't work out. Grant's students tend to go above and beyond what they are minimally capable of, a characteristic that prevails in her understanding of student achievement and motivation specific to her classroom population.

Grant understands her students' achievement and motivation through the lens of the Gifted and Talented program in which they are enrolled. One of the first things that Grant told me is that her students are similar in the sense that they are all very bright, but they come from "a variety of backgrounds and experiences" (Int. Trans., 1/26/17). Grant's understanding of opportunity, experience, and difference are discussed later, but this section focuses on the common themes of achievement and motivation that bind her students together regardless of their color, creed, or socioeconomic status. Grant understands motivation in her classroom to be "two-fold," with one idea applying to all students regardless of skill level or program type and one applying to her Gifted students more specifically. First, "most children want to please their teacher," and within Grant's classroom, "most kids want to make good grades" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17).

Grant finds that the by-choice nature of this program lends itself to a natural "academic competition amongst students" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). She believes that her male students benefit most from the sense of academic competition, explaining that she doesn't "have to push boys to be smart" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). She remarked that other schools have trouble bringing boys up to their full academic potential because "they don't think it's cool or macho" to be smart (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). In Grant's case, specifically, many of the high school athletes and organization leaders, both male and female, were Gifted students in her fifth grade class. She told me proudly that "the quarterback of the football team was...one of our students," "last year...seven of the nine starters on the baseball team were [my] students" and so were last year's drum major and drum majorette (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Her current students look up to these older students as role models and see "what they're kind of expected to do" once they get to high school (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). For Grant's fifth grade students, being smart isn't just cool, it's an expectation.

Grant understands that expectations are set for her students through a variety of different channels. Though Grant has high standards and clear expectations for her students, she doesn't "think there's as much pressure on teachers here" because the students themselves have a high level of expectation for themselves (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Part of this expectation stems from the by-choice nature of the Gifted program and the natural academic competition and desire to succeed that arises. A second component of the student-formed expectation comes from the example that they see in older Treeport ISD students. Grant said that her old students "tend to come back and see us," and they share with current students about how they have been successful in high school and college (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Grant gave an example of one of her former students who came to visit her little brother (who is in Grant's class) and shared with the

students about her experience at Duke. This student's experience, combined with the experiences of countless other Treeport ISD students, creates an image and expectation for Grant's students to live into.

Grant helps support this expectation of academic achievement and leadership by making sure that her students have access to different colleges and universities while they are in her class. The conversations that Grant has with students about their future do not center around whether or not they will go to college, but rather where they would like to go. Grant takes her students to see several different universities each year because she "wants them to understand what a college environment looks like" and to begin to think with a higher education-focused mindset (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). The effort that Grant makes to physically place her students on college campuses at a young age makes the expectation of higher education more realistic and achievable for them.

Not only is there a significant amount of expectation within the students and a healthy amount of expectation from Grant, she finds that "there's a lot of expectation from parents" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Grant said that very few parents are indifferent, but rather "value education and want their children to do well" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). The nature of the by-choice Gifted program draws parents that will push their children and won't "be happy with a C" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Additionally, Grant sees that many of the minority parents, especially the more economically disadvantaged families, "are working really hard to help their children understand that the way out of poverty is education" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Grant understands that part of her role as a teacher is to help her students take advantage of the opportunity for education that they have and not to let them waste it.

Grant's understanding of the role and responsibility of a teacher has shifted dramatically over time as she learned about the specific needs of her students and the broader needs of public education. When Grant was trained as a teacher, education was very one sided -- she described it to me as "teacher talks, students listen, kind of like going to church" where the "teacher was preaching and everybody else was supposed to listen" (Int. Trans., 1/26/17). Over the years, however, she has realized that it is more important for her to be a "guide and part of the system" rather than the controller of her students' education (Int. Trans., 1/26/17). Grant now says that it is her privilege to help her students become self-directed learners by giving them "more and more responsibility for finding the answer, instead of telling them the answer" (Int. Trans., 1/26/17). In this way, she develops in them a sense of pride in their education because it is something that they have sought out and accomplished for themselves. Grant likes the idea that she and her students are all learning together, "that they're learning with [her] instead of from [her]" (Int. Trans., 1/26/17).

Grant takes her role as a guide through education very seriously, but her first passion is helping her students grow a desire to want to learn and know more. She works to satisfy this goal by exposing her students to "as many new ideas and things as [she] can" during the time she has with them" (Int. Trans., 1/26/17). Whether it's reading a wide variety of literary genres or taking an environmental boat trip in Galveston, Grant creates opportunities for her students to be introduced to things that they have never had contact with before. When she shared that "we try to expose them to as many things that will make them want to learn and know more," there was a mix of excitement and desperation in her tone that made me believe in her commitment to these kids and in the value of the work that she, and others like her, are doing (Int. Trans., 1/26/17).

Aside from guiding her students through their education and exposing them to new things, Grant sees it as her responsibility to familiarize her students with a wide range of ideas and perspectives so that they can make their own decisions about what to think. The buzz around the election this year lent itself well to this practice. Grant never tells her students "who [she's] going to vote for, but [she] always [wants] them to know that there's more than one candidate" (Int. Trans., 1/26/17). When her class studied the Civil War, Grant explored the issues and causes surrounding the conflict from a Texan point of view, but spent time exploring the perspective of the Northern states and how the conflict still affects us today. Grant uses what her students know and have experienced to help them develop new perspectives and understanding of historical events and current issues. When one of her students made an offensive comment about 'building a wall,' she took that opportunity to "have a little circle up" and talk about how those words made people feel (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). One student shared that she was afraid she wouldn't "get to go visit [her] grandparents in Mexico if they crack down on all this immigration" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Grant said that conversations like these "are really a good thing for our class" because it helps open up the mindset of more privileged students who can't or don't "always see [things] from someone else's perspective" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17).

Learning to see beyond yourself is an important quality of leadership development, which is another role that Grant feels called to. She believes that it is necessary to help her students develop life skill outside of academics because, as Gifted children, "they probably are going to be leaders and you want them to be compassionate" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Grant works to grow her students into "that whole list of adjectives you want them to be," so that when they leave her room "they have the skills to be able to do whatever they want to do as they go into middle

school and high school" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Part of that means teaching students how to ask for and accept help when they need it.

Though Grant's students are very bright, some of them don't have all of the resources or support that they need to be successful in her classroom. This is where Grant's role as a "helper" comes into play. Grant explains that "children in a Gifted program that come from a low economic background are very reluctant to ask for help because they don't want anyone to know that they are different" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Grant makes a point to know each of her students well so that she can recognize who might need extra help or support with a project, whether that's using a school printer or borrowing supplies for a poster. She works diligently to preserve the dignity of her students by initiating an offer for help, rather than making them come to her. Grant remarked emphatically that "[her] job is to help them be successful, not to catch them failing" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Grant recognizes that the needs of her students are different, and she doesn't punish them for things that are outside of their control.

Grant understands difference, in terms of race and ethnicity, as something that should be used to develop her students, rather than divide them. Grant said that one of the best things about teaching is getting to learn from the families of her students. She described a day where she "was with one of [her] Muslim parents on a field trip on the school bus for the whole day and she told me a lot about...her experiences and her background" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). She said that one of the best things about teaching is how much she has learned about the Hispanic community and how she has grown to respect the "way they treat each other and how they feel about family" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Grant said that these conversations and experiences have widened her worldview and "enriched [her] as a person" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Not only does Grant

recognize how experience with different perspectives and cultures can improve her life, but she sees the importance of developing that nuanced understanding in her students.

Grant shared that a friend of hers recently made a generalized and false accusation about Muslims that Grant was immediately able to diffuse because of her experience. In that moment, she said she realized how fortunate she was to have experiences with other cultures through teaching, rather than being "stuck in a vacuum where everybody was just like her" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Grant said that she "felt sorry for this woman," and others like her, because she "doesn't even realize that she has no perspective on other races and other ethnic communities" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Grant said she refuses to allow her students to live in such a narrow mindset, but rather has them teach each other about difference. When her class discussed immigration this year, Grant encouraged her students to share their feelings and experiences with the class. Additionally, when students travel internationally, she has them give presentations upon their return about what they saw and learned while abroad. After traveling to India for two weeks, one of Grant's students returned with pictures and answered all kinds of questions for the class. In this way, "kids are able to see firsthand...different cultures through the eyes of their classmates that they love and like" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17).

Grant said that there is more to life than what she knows and that she is "always learning and growing because of the children that [she teaches]" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). She recognizes and respects the different cultures and beliefs of her students as something to learn from rather than a deficit to overcome. She is aware of the benefit that diversity adds to a community and she promotes exposure to this kind of diversity as an important factor of personal growth. Grant opposes the closed-mindedness that often comes with living in a small, rural community and she

combats that by using difference as a learning tool in her classroom. However, it is important to note that Grant's awareness of difference extends beyond her understanding of race and culture as an opportunity for learning and growth.

Grant understands inequality in terms of the socioeconomic difference that manifests itself amongst her students. Even though Baker Elementary has a dress code intended to diminish the obvious signs of economic inequality, Grant says that "children cannot hide their economic background" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Because of this, Grant makes a point to teach her students that disadvantage, economic or otherwise, is not something to be ashamed of. Many of Grant's students have had limited access to diverse experiences and opportunities outside of the Treeport area. Grant has students who have "spent the summer in Europe and [she] has children who have never seen the Gulf of Mexico" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). She told me that "overall, [Treeport] is a poor community" and "our children don't have as many experiences as you would like for them to have" (Int. Trans., 1/26/17). Rather than pitying or punishing them for that, she works diligently to expose all of her students to things that will broaden their worldview, like their annual "Spend the Night at the Zoo program" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). This goes back to how Grant assumes the role of a helper, aiding students in their success by "[bridging] the gap with them," instead of waiting and watching for them to fail (Int. Trans., 2/10/17).

Additionally, Grant understands that the way her students perceive their economic advantage or disadvantage affects what they are willing to share about other parts of their lives that make them different from their peers. Grant noted that her "students whose parents are Indian doctors are much more likely to speak up about where they're from and their faith than a child whose parents are running a store" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Her more economically

disadvantaged students are less likely to share about their unique experiences or beliefs because they already view themselves as different from their classmates. Grant works to help her students overcome this feeling of disadvantage by talking about the importance of opportunity. In a recent grammar lesson she pointed out that good "grammar is the mark of a good education, not a smart person, because not every person has had the opportunity to have a good education" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Grant does her best to give her students access to opportunities outside of what they would normally have and teaches her students to take full advantage of the opportunities that come their way.

Grant understands her community in terms of what it can and cannot provide to her students. Grant associates the rural nature of her community with the low socioeconomic status of many of the families who live there. Because of the low level of resources in the community, many of her students come from families who have limited amounts of resources at home. Because of that, Grant devotes a significant amount of time, energy, and money to supporting her students outside of regular school hours. She said that "when you teach in a poor community, that's going to be part of it" (Int. Trans., 1/26/17). Grant noted that she is fortunate to be "with a district that wants us to do and provide every opportunity that we can," but she realizes that is easier said than done in a poor community like Treeport (Int. Trans., 1/26/17). Fortunately, there are parents of means in the community who will "help pay for other children" who can't afford field trips or other activities (Int. Trans., 1/26/17). Grant said that teachers pay for students and the school helps out where it can so that they "never leave a child behind because they can't pay" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Even with the generosity of members of the community, "poverty is the tough part" and it's not going anywhere any time soon (Int. Trans., 1/26/17).

Grant understands her community in terms of the diversity that she has experienced there. Grant said that "when [she] first started teaching, [she] lived in a society where there were black children and white children, but the longer [she's] taught, the more diverse [her] community has become" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). As Treeport evolved, the student population more closely came to resemble an equal distribution between white, black and Hispanic kids. Over the last few years, Grant has noticed a growth in her Asian and Indian student populations and has had several children from Burma and Vietnam as well. Grant celebrates the growing diversity of her community and continues to be enriched by the many different experiences and backgrounds of her students and their families.

Grant said that she understands Treeport isn't necessarily as diverse as some urban areas, but she recognizes that "white flight" has caused a severe lack of diversity in many big cities because some parents "want their kids to be in schools with other kids just like them" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Treeport, as the 'hub' of its rural community, is somewhat protected against this 'white flight' because the district's schools are some of the best in the area. Because parents in the community have limited options for where to send their child to school, the growing diversity of the community is preserved within Treeport ISD schools. Students and teachers alike can benefit from exposure to the diversity of experience, tradition, and belief that can be found in Treeport ISD schools.

Grant understands parent support and involvement outside of race and socioeconomic stereotypes. She says that the nature of her by-choice Gifted program means that most of her students' parents "value education and want their children to do well" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Grant knows that Treeport is a poor community and she sees many families that are willing to

sacrifice a lot for their children because they recognize education as the pathway out of poverty. Grant also knows that there are some parents who just don't have the resources to fully support their child's education. However, she recognizes that being a 'good parent' isn't tied to race or economic status. In Grant's experience, good parenting "doesn't always follow under socioeconomic boundaries" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). She's had some "wonderful low income parents" and "some really bad ones too" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Her experience shows her that "it goes both ways" as far as using race or socioeconomic status to indicate good parenting (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). There's no rule or formula based on race or socioeconomic status to determine whether her students parents will be good or bad, but, no matter the circumstance, Grant is always aware of the type of homes that her students come from. Understanding the home-life and circumstances of the children in her class is an important part of her relationship with her students.

Grant understands the student-teacher relationship as a part of her role as a teacher that must be intentionally and consciously nourished and cultivated. Grant says that in order to be successful as a teacher, "you really have to learn your kids" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). She recognizes that developing that deep understanding of each student "takes time and being aware and asking questions and observing what's going on" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Grant sees which students are more needy than others, which need a little extra encouragement, which have great parents at home, which are economically disadvantaged, etc. But aside from knowing about their families and home circumstances, it is important to discover what is important to each student and show a genuine interest in their interests. Grant came to a deeper understanding of the importance of this component of the student-teacher relationships when her own children became school aged. She

remembers how powerful it was "if their teacher acted interested in what they were doing in their lives, and if they actually [showed] up to watch you do something" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Grant uses that experience to help direct how she interacts with her students. Grant's students are involved in a wide variety of activities -- they play basketball and baseball, dance, show horses, etc. -- and if she is "aware of it, [she tries] to show up for something they do" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). She does her best to be physically present at her students' activities, but when she is unable to attend she makes sure that she shows interest in their lives in other ways. When her dancers come back from competitions she has them share their experience with the class because she knows that "they spend so much time with it" and that "it's so important to them" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17).

Not only does Grant make an effort to be aware of the students' background as well as their personal interests, she also pays close attention to their needs specific to academic achievement within her classroom environment. This special attention to each student manifests itself clearly in the way that Grant assigns seats to students in her classroom. She makes sure that students who she is concerned about, whether academically or otherwise, are seated close to her desk so that she can keep an eye on them. Grant separates her chatty students so she doesn't end up with a "table with all the talkers there," and she tries to seat students with reading challenges at tables with stronger readers (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). She pays close attention to the abilities, needs, personalities, etc. of her students when creating seating assignments so that she can position each student to be successful in the classroom.

The most important part of the student-teacher relationship as Grant sees it is the trust that teachers must build with their students. She believes that it is "real important for students to

trust their teacher and know that she is there for them" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Grant shared that she stepped into a situation recently where several students were having a heated disagreement and she promised one of the students that she would not allow the others to continue to treat him that way. When she asked the student if he trusted her, he said "I think I do." Grant said that she was wounded by the student's response because he didn't fully trust her to protect him. She realizes that she can't protect her students from everything in life, but when it comes to school and other environments within her control she makes it a priority to ensure that students know she is on their side.

Grant recognizes that trust is built by first earning the respect of her students. She works to establish early on that she desires to be a teacher and wants to build a relationship with each student. She told me about a teacher who had a coffee cup that said, "three reasons to teach: June, July and August," and how counterintuitive that mindset is to being an effective teacher. She said that if your students believe you are only teaching to get the summers off, "they'll never respect you and they're not going to learn as much from you, or learn as much with you" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Grant works everyday to prove to her students that she wants to be there with them and that they are her first priority.

Grant's Understanding of Culturally Relevant/Responsive Pedagogy

In addition to the many themes that emerged out of my conversations with Grant and the observations I made in her classroom, several key considerations regarding her understanding of Culturally Relevant/Responsive Pedagogy came to light during my time with her. During our second interview, Grant said that she was not familiar with CR/RP. After reading a brief summary of the theory that I provided to her, she said that she would "very much like [her]

teaching to be modeled after this" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). She also seemed willing to give it a shot, mentioning that she "might have to do a little more research on it" to see what she would need to do differently in her classroom to fit the description of a culturally responsive teacher (Int. Trans., 2/10/17).

Though Grant had never heard of CR/RP, I found evidence of characteristics related to the theory in her interview responses and observations from her classroom. Most notably, she seemed to be operating from a relatively developed understanding of both sociopolitical consciousness and cultural competence. Though she would not have used those specific terms to describe her teaching practices, evidence of a foundational understanding of these two concepts were found across her interview responses. Grant teaches her students to "look at different approaches" to history and the world to understand things from more than one perspective (Int. Trans., 1/26/17). She said that this approach was especially important this year because of the election and all of the issues that came up in relation to it. When they covered topics like immigration, Grant encouraged her students to share their own experiences with these issues. She also brings speakers to talk to her class about issues that they do not have experience with, such as segregation. During their unit on Martin Luther King, Jr., Grant brings in men and women from the community to speak to her class about their firsthand experiences with segregation in the South.

Aside from encouraging students to share out of their own experience and exposing students to new perspectives and viewpoints outside of their own practical knowledge, Grant promotes difference amongst her students as something to be used for learning and growth. She is grateful for the diversity that she finds in her rural classroom and takes advantage of

opportunities for students to share their culture and experience with their peers. She is wary of the national climate that seems to be "wanting to put everybody back in their pigeonholes" and works to teach her students to celebrate diversity, rather than to just accept it (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Grant recognizes the difference between "being tolerant of other people's cultures and understanding and incorporating them into your lessons," and admits that there is a severe lack of training in this regard within her district (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Regardless of her lack of formal training in this area, she is quick to acknowledge how her experience with racial and cultural difference through teaching has enriched her life, and it is obvious that she works diligently to broaden the world view of her students outside of what might be accepted as the norm in her small, rural community.

Grant's practice of having her students teach their peers about cultural difference is evidence of her devotion to creating a community of learners within her classroom. The first time I visited Grant's classroom I noticed the arrangement of her desks into small groups of four and five which she later told me we were intended to foster conversation and discussion amongst her students. She said that she "would really love to have tables instead of desks" and laughed when she noted that "you have to work with what you have" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). What Grant does have is a diverse student population, and she takes advantage of that whenever she can. The presentations I mentioned earlier that her students who travel during the year give when they return are based off of questions that their peers supply. Grant fosters a classroom environment where students can be the experts on topics and share their knowledge and experience with their peers. She not only takes advantage of their diverse cultural backgrounds, but utilizes their varied interests in her teaching. During one of my observation days in her class, I watched as students

gave presentations over topics that they had researched in relation to their current social studies unit (Field Obs., 1/27/17). As students talked about the roles of bakers, trappers, traders, etc. in the early days of America, each one was able to share from their own interest in the topic as well as the information that they had gathered. Students asked questions of the presenter, and the class learned a lot from each other over the course of the activity.

Not only does Grant work to establish a community of learners within her classroom, she sees the importance of being involved in the community of her students. When I described CR/RP to Grant, she immediately pointed out the part of the description that indicated a teacher's responsibility to be "part of their student's community, in and outside of school" and to "pursue and individual relationship with each student." Grant is involved in many organizations throughout her community and she makes a point to attend her students' basketball games and dance recitals, but she understands that she could be more involved in the lives of her students. Grant pointed to Baker Elementary's principal as a great example of what it means to be truly involved in the lives of her students and sees room for personal growth in that area of her responsibility as a teacher.

After Grant and I discussed the key tenets of CR/RP and chatted about some of the ways that I saw these characteristics embodied in her classroom and teaching philosophy, I asked her to share what she believed to be the biggest barriers obstructing the implementation of CR/RP in classrooms. Without hesitation, Grant said that she felt "plain old racism" would be the biggest obstacle to cultivating cultural responsiveness in classrooms (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). She noted that "there's still a lot of racists and they're alive and well in East Texas" and that she thinks "there's just a lot of racist people in education" who want "everybody to believe what [they]

believe" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). In Grant's opinion, many educators aren't willing to "showcase [different] cultures rather than put them down," and until there is a shift in attitude among teachers, CR/RP won't be possible in their classrooms (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Grant recognized the human tendency to be unwilling to look beyond yourself as a barrier to CR/RP, but she also understands that there is a teacher population held back by lack of awareness.

Aside from general racism, Grant sees lack of cultural awareness and knowledge as a barrier to CR/RP. She said that "not knowing what different cultures represent and what values they have" along with not knowing "how to incorporate them into your teaching" serves as an obstacle to the implementation of CR/RP (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Grant has been fortunate enough to be exposed to many different cultures, traditions and belief systems over her years as a teacher and those experiences have developed a sense of cultural awareness and appreciation in her. Some teachers, however, have not had the opportunity or desire to take advantage of similar experiences and therefore lack a nuanced view of the role that culture plays in education. Even though Grant has a strong foundation of cultural awareness, she says that she, like many other teachers, would need more and specific education and instruction on how to integrate culture and difference effectively into elementary curriculum.

Grant sees racism manifested in the classroom as a lack of interest in positively addressing culture and difference. She sees this, along with a lack of awareness of culture and difference, as barriers to CR/RP. Additionally, Grant brought up another less obvious obstacle. She said that lack of diversity in a community or school might make it difficult for teachers to implement CR/RP there because "they probably don't see a need for it" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). If teachers aren't dealing with a diverse student population or a diverse community setting, they

likely don't have a sense of urgency for including curriculum that addresses culture and difference. Grant understands that part of her motivation to include culture in her curriculum stems from her student population and their diverse set of experiences, but she recognizes that it is just as, if not more, important to include curriculum that highlights culture and difference in schools where diversity is not a natural occurrence.

Summary of Findings

Carolyn Grant is a wonderful juxtaposition -- progressive and traditional, fierce and loving, strong-willed and good-humored. She teaches with the conviction of a calling and cultivates experiences in the classroom that enrich her life and the lives of her students. Grant has dedicated the majority of her life to teaching, and her longevity in the field shows in the way that she understands her students and their needs. Over the course of several interviews and classroom observations, I gained insight into Grant's teaching philosophy and how she regards and makes sense of Culturally Relevant/Responsive Pedagogy.

Grant has a high expectation for and understanding of student capability, and she recognizes the ability of each student to achieve by "teaching up" to them. Grant refuses to diminish or ignore the ability of her students, no matter their skill level, and she is quick to adapt her teaching strategy to fit the varied and individual needs and abilities of her students. Grant also believes in allowing her students to take risks with their success, encouraging them to challenge themselves beyond their determined skill level. She does not limit her students to what they are minimally capable of, but instead supports them as they go above and beyond their perceived abilities.

Generally speaking, Grant's students are eager to push the limits of their ability, a characteristic that she ties to the nature of her Gifted/Talented student population. Grant understands her student's achievement and motivation outside of their race or socioeconomic status, and rather as a product of the by-choice program that they are enrolled in. Natural academic competition arises amongst her students, and they push each other to make good grades and live up to the college-ready expectation that Grant sets for them. They are also motivated by the examples that older students set for them.

The model of older Treeport ISD students is one way that Grant understands expectation setting for her students. Graduates of the Gifted program at Baker go on to be leaders in high school and set an example and expectation of achievement for those in Grant's class today. Grant also recognizes her role in expectation setting for her students. She views her class as a college-readiness program and she exposes her students to different opportunities at colleges and universities in order to foster a higher education-focused mindset. Additionally, Grant finds that a significant amount of expectation of achievement and success comes from her students' parents. Most of the families that she deals with "value education and want their children to do well," a sentiment that follows their students into the classroom (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). No matter where the expectations come from, Grant harnesses them and does not allow her students to waste their opportunities for learning and growth.

Grant understands herself as a guide for her students through their education. Though she was trained using the direct-teaching method, over the years she realized the importance of developing self-directed learners. She works hard to cultivate a classroom environment that inspires her students to want to learn and know more. Grant also believes that it is her

responsibility as a teacher to expose her students to a variety of ideas and perspectives so that they can make their own decisions about what to believe. She uses the lived experiences of her students to help the class develop new understanding -- in this way, she and her students are always learning from each other and growing together. Grant also develops life and leadership skills in her students, teaching them how to ask for help when they need it. Grant understands that, though her students are very bright, they do not all have the additional resources that they need to be successful. In these circumstances, Grant preserves the dignity of her students and teaches them that there is no shame in needing assistance. Above all, Grant views herself as a support system for her students, whatever their needs might be.

Part of that support comes in the way that she views diversity in her classroom. Grant understands racial and cultural difference as something that should be used for learning an growth. Grant says that being exposed to different traditions, belief systems, and cultures through her many years of teaching has immensely enriched her life, and she does her best to impart that attitude on her students. Grant works hard to broaden the mindsets of her students and open up their world views by encouraging them to share from their own experience and teach each other about difference. She refuses to let the narrowness of her small, rural community impede her students' personal and academic growth -- rather she promotes exposure to diversity and difference and makes an effort to incorporate those themes in her classroom. Grant also recognizes difference outside of race and culture. Differences in socio-economic standing amongst her students is where she sees the biggest inequality in her classroom. Grant teaches her students that disadvantage is not something to be ashamed of, but she prompts them to learn

from their own experiences and encourages them to take advantage of the opportunities that come their way.

Treeport is a poor community, but Grant does not let that get in the way of exposing her students to new opportunities and experiences. She recognizes that many of her students' families do not have extra resources to allot to their child's education, so she devotes time, energy and money to supporting her students outside of school. Grant sees it as the nature of the job when you're in a community like Treeport and she takes that responsibility in stride. She is also thankful for the families of means in the community who help support the less privileged students. Grant honors the generosity of members of the community, but acknowledges that poverty continues to be an obstacle.

Grant also recognizes the increase in diversity that her community has experienced over the years. Since she began teaching in the district, her student population has grown to include a wider variety of races and cultures. Grant celebrates that difference as an opportunity for personal growth, both in herself and in her students. Additionally, she is thankful for the rural nature of the area because its lack of proximity to larger school districts preserves the diversity of the community and allows students to be exposed to others unlike themselves on a regular basis. Grant believes that students, teachers, and the wider community benefit from exposure to the diversity of experience, tradition and belief that can be found in Treeport ISD.

Grant understands that being a 'good parent' isn't tied to racial or socioeconomic stereotypes. She has experience with wonderful low-income parents and terrible advantaged parents, and vice versa. In her experience, however, most of her students' parents value education and a willing to sacrifice a lot because they "want their children to do well" (Int. Trans.,

2/10/17). Grant knows that there is no formula that determines what kind of parents a child will have, but she makes it a point to know their home-life and circumstances so that she can better understand their needs.

Grant takes the time to cultivate and nourish a relationship with each of her students. She has a deep understanding of her students' family and circumstances and she is aware of their abilities, needs and struggles. Grant discovers what is important to each of her students, shows a genuine interest in it, and does her best to support their interests. Grant attends a variety of activities that her students are involved in, but sees the exceptional example that her principal sets for this component of the student-teacher relationship and realizes that she can do more. Not only is grant aware of their lives outside of school, but she puts a significant amount of energy attending to the lives of her students in the classroom. She learns what each student needs to be successful in her class and does her best to provide that for each student. Most importantly, she earns the trust and respect of her students by proving daily that she is committed to them as her priority.

Before taking part in the research, Grant had never heard of Culturally Relevant/ Responsive Pedagogy. After we discusses some of the key considerations surrounding CR/RP, Grant mentioned that she would very much like her teaching to resemble this theory, though she felt it might take some work. Though Grant's strategy could use some tweaks here and there, I did find evidence of characteristics related to CR/RP in her interview responses and observation data. Grant has a reasonably developed understanding of sociopolitical consciousness and cultural competence and appears comfortable addressing them in class, but she could use a bit more intentionality behind her inclusion of these topics in her classroom. Grant cultivates a

community of learners by encouraging her students to share out of their own experience in order to teach their peers about difference. The arrangement of her classroom promotes discussion and group work so that her students can learn from each other. Grant also recognizes the importance of being involved in her students' community outside of school and makes a point to show up to support her students at their activities.

After discussing how I saw CR/RP play out in her classroom, I asked Grant what she believed stood as barriers to implementing this theory in classrooms. First, she noted that plain racism keeps educators from teaching in this manner because they are unwilling to look beyond themselves and honor difference as a tool for learning. Additionally, she sees lack of cultural awareness and knowledge as a barrier to CR/RP. Though Grant has been fortunate enough to be exposed to a variety of cultures and traditions, not all teachers have that opportunity and therefore lack appreciation and understanding of difference. Whether through lack of opportunity or lack of interest, some educators do not have a nuanced understanding of the role that culture plays in education. Though Grant has a strong foundation of cultural awareness, she feels that she, and many other teachers, world need direct and specific instruction regarding the effective implementation of culturally responsive tactics in the classroom. Grant also sees lack of diversity in a community as a barrier to CR/RP. If diversity is not encountered on a daily basis, there is likely no sense of urgency to address it.

Though Grant seemed enthusiastic about the prospect of further implementing culturally responsive tactics in her classroom, she must confront her willingness to push herself outside of her comfort level. Grant has shown that she is capable of assessing her own comfort zone and consciously pushing herself beyond it. As a young teacher, she used to be afraid to address

differences in race and culture in the classroom, but now she claims to be able to incorporate those topics "without fear" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). During her interviews and classroom observations, I noted many occasions when Grant promoted and encouraged discussion surrounding issues of difference related to race, culture, beliefs, economics, etc. Grant understands the importance of teaching her students about difference, diversity, and the issues that go with those themes. She recognizes that they are not too young to process meaningful conversations about race, culture, etc. and she doesn't shy away from these conversations (Adair & Doucet, 2013) These discussions, however, were bi-products of the curriculum that Grant had chosen to cover, rather than driving factors behind curriculum selection. In order for Grant to fully embrace CR/RP and completely develop her understanding of sociopolitical consciousness and cultural competence, she must start intentionally incorporating these social issues into her curriculum, rather than just covering them when they come up.

Though it is obvious that Grant has made great strides over the years as she developed a more nuanced understanding of her role as a teacher, there are still some barriers for her to face if she hopes to implement CR/RP in her classroom. Aside from actively incorporating culturally responsive material in her curriculum, Grant has to address the role that she plays in her community. Though she is involved in several organizations and makes an effort to attend events and activities that are important to her students, she must decide whether she is comfortable with the level of commitment that she shows to her students. Based on her interviews and observations, Grant works diligently to show her students that they are her number one priority. In reality, she understands that there is more she can do to act as a support system in all aspects of her students' lives. Grant recognizes her campus principal as a great model of an educator who

truly puts her students first and agrees that she could serve to learn from her example. It seems trite to call on Grant to sacrifice more of herself when she is already giving so much to her students, but if she is willing to devote herself to implementing CR/RP she must also be willing to sacrifice some of her own comfort for the sake of her students.

Though Carolyn Grant definitely has areas that need improvement in the direction of cultural responsiveness, her overall teaching strategy shows exciting foundations for CR/RP. She is loyal and devoted to her students and committed to growing them both academically and personally. Grant honors the experiences of her students and promotes diversity and difference as tools for learning and growth. She sets high expectations for her students and provides every means of support necessary for them to be successful. Grant is a surprising mix of tradition and nuance who takes pride in her role as a teacher. Quick to laugh and slow to accept defeat, Carolyn Grant is a force to be reckoned with.

Chapter 6: Amy Williams

Teacher Profile & Background Information

When I walked up to Amy Williams's classroom at Boyd Elementary after school on a Thursday for our first interview, I saw Williams and another teacher huddled over her desk. I knocked gently on the door and when Williams looked up, she beckoned me in with a big wave. When I approached, she asked me to wait just a minute while she and the other teacher finished going over some changes that they needed to make to their teaching plan. I smiled and gave them some space, but listened intently as they talked about a few ways that they could adjust their teaching to better suit their students. In just a few minutes they were finished and Williams and I sat down to begin our interview. In listening to their brief conversation, I had sensed a selflessness about Williams that caught my attention. As we worked our way through the first interview, and in the conversations and observations that would follow, Williams continued to exude a servant-heartedness that could not, and should not, be ignored.

From the start, Williams was transparent and honest, willingly sharing her life with me and opening up about her experiences. Every word that left her mouth painted a picture of her loving and generous spirit and spoke to her bold, go-getter attitude. Williams is quick to laugh, but has a seriousness and maturity about her that contrasts her young age. Her gentleness and kindness, coupled with the learned toughness of someone who has fought hard through life's struggles, makes her the kind of strong that you do not want to mess with. Though she is young, Williams has lived a life full of the good and bad. She roots herself firmly in her beliefs, and there is very little that shakes her. In the first minute that I had known Williams, I was blown

away by what I had seen in her. As we sat there in her classroom, I asked her question after question, dying to know more about this whirlwind of a woman.

To begin, I asked Williams to describe her personal identity. She identified herself as female, White, and middle class and added that "she came from poor but worked very hard to be middle class" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Though Grant and her family are economically comfortable now, she remembers what it was like growing up. She did not learn to read until she was in third grade. She showed up to school in dirty clothes with unbrushed teeth and messy hair. She lived in a car and walked herself to school. She shared that, eventually, she was raised by an aunt and uncle because her biological parents could not take care of her. Williams has hoed a tough row, but she is quick to reflect on her experiences as a child as formative period that pushed her to work hard to escape her circumstances. She acknowledges her teachers, along with her family, as the reason that she has come so far, and why she decided to become a teacher.

After Williams mentioned that, I pushed her to elaborate on what led her to become a teacher. She said that her "teachers were there for me" and that, had they not been, she would not be where she is today (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). She decided to become a classroom teacher because she wanted to be able to provide the kind of love and support to students that her teachers gave her when she was growing up. Williams also noted an experience with a particular student as a motivator for becoming a classroom teacher. When she was teaching PE at a private school in Treeport, Williams helped a student through a tough situation and realized that "she could help more kids if [she] were in the classroom" (Int. Trans., 1/26/17). She continues to be motivated to teach because she knows that she "can relate to these students" on a personal level and understands what many of them are facing (Int. Trans., 1/26/17). Additionally, Williams loves

reading and she "wanted to teach kids the love of reading" (Int. Trans., 1/26/17). Williams was drawn to teaching by a multitude of factors, but I was blown away by how deeply personal her call to teaching was and how much meaning she finds in her job.

In hearing Williams's reasons for becoming a teacher, I was intrigued how she transitioned into that role from her previous career as a PE teacher. I asked her to describe how she moved from one role to another in the world of education. She told me that she had been teaching PE at a private school in Treeport for seven years when she decided she wanted to be a classroom teacher. She hadn't graduated from college, so at 31 years old she went back to school and earned her degree and teaching certificate online through a teacher education program at a nearby university. Once she earned her degree, she began teaching fifth grade reading, language arts and social studies at Boyd Elementary. When I interviewed Williams, she was in the middle of her second full year as a classroom teacher. My jaw hit the floor when she told me that -- judging by the way Williams runs her classroom and interacts with her students you'd never guess that she was practically brand new to the job. The "Treeport ISD Newcomer of the Year" award that hangs behind her desk speaks to Williams' natural gift for teaching and her uncanny knack for managing a classroom.

Part of what makes Williams exceptional in the classroom is her experience with different student populations. Before she became a classroom teacher at Boyd Elementary, she was a PE instructor at one of Treeport's private schools. She described her students at the private school as "obviously economically advantaged" with little to no discipline problems (Int. Trans., 1/26.17). At Boyd, Williams has "some [students] that are middle and higher class, but 85% to 95% of [her] students are lower economic" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). When she transitioned into her role at

Boyd, she went from a private setting to teaching in a "public setting for the largest district in our area" where the overwhelming majority of students are from low socioeconomic status families and are "socially disadvantaged" (Int. Trans., 1/26/17). At Boyd, Williams teaches a "high number of African-American students," a "low number of Caucasian students," and a Hispanic student population that is "right in the middle between the two" (Int. Trans., 1/26/17). Williams noted that moving from her first teaching environment to her job at Boyd was a big transition, but she feels that "[her] job here is so much more important than it was at the private school" because she is "able to teach and touch more lives" (Int. Trans., 1/26/17). Williams' passion for teaching and the connection that she feels with her students comes out in her teaching philosophy.

Though Williams has only recently entered the world of classroom teaching, she has a well developed teaching philosophy that draws from her teacher education as well as her own experiences and her understanding of her students. Her teacher training focused heavily on implementing student-centered learning, something that Williams has carried with her to Boyd. She understands, however, that "you have to change on a whim sometimes" because "what worked for my [students] last year may not work for [her students] this year" (Int. Trans., 1/26/17). She inserts herself into the middle of student-learning, reading aloud to them and asking questions to get her students thinking and spark discussion.

Though Williams is intently involved in each students' learning in a hands-on way, she recognizes the importance of teaching her students to be responsible for their own education. Rather than just giving them the answer, she creates a classroom environment where students develop the skills and have access to the support that they need to come to an understanding on

their own. Williams works to achieve this kind of learning through different forms of group work because she sees that her students learn better when "they hear it from another student" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Williams teaches for the "light-bulb moment," when something really clicks for each of her students (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). She loves to see her students "take their learning and just blossom out of it" (Int. Trans., 2/ 8/17).

Additionally, Williams' teaching philosophy centers around her love and appreciation of reading. She works to make reading fun for her students because she believes that "when a student loves to read for pleasure then they'll read when they don't necessarily want to" (Int. Trans., 1/26/17). When her class goes to the library, she encourages her students to choose books that they will enjoy. Williams recalled the teachers she had that would force her to choose a certain kind of book and she quickly asserted that she was "not that type of teacher" (Int. Trans., 1/26/17). She wants her students to pick books that are "good for them and catch their attention" so that they will view reading as beneficial rather than burdensome (Int. Trans., 1/26/17).

Williams' personal experience with poverty and disadvantage colors how she views teaching. She believes that the poorest, most disadvantaged child "deserves the same education as everybody else" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Her teachers did not discount her because of her circumstances, and Williams refuses to write off her students. She uses her experiences to relate to her students and show them that it is possible to overcome your circumstances. Williams promotes this idea of moving beyond your circumstances through academic achievement, but she believes that she can benefit her students most by loving and caring for them well. She understands how important it is for her students to know that she cares for them "even if they're not successful at school" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). She told one student that:

> "I don't care if you learn anything outside of school this year as long as you know that you have somebody that supports you. That's me. I support you." (Int. Trans., 2/8/17)

She said that "if [she] can change one life, [she's] doing [her] job" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17).

Though Williams has only been teaching in the classroom for two years, it was easy to tell that she had impacted the lives of dozens of students. To hear her talk about her 'kids' (her students) is to understand how deeply devoted she is to loving each and everyone one of then, no matter what. She's a 'tour de force' kind of teacher -- bringing a masterpiece of triumph and victory out of chaos. Her students leave her class knowing that they are not alone in the world, something that Williams considers her greatest achievement. Williams is a whirlwind of energy and spunk, goofy and fun, but tough as nails. She greets each day as a new adventure and is rarely swayed by the challenges that she faces in her classroom. Amy Williams is about as real as it gets. She doesn't sugar coat the truth and she shoots straight with her students, whether she's telling them that they need to get their act together or letting them know how much she loves them.

Description of Classroom Setting

When I arrived in Amy Williams' class for my first round of observations, she had her students in the hall for a mandatory bathroom break. While she corralled the 5th graders, she sent me into the classroom to get settled in. While I waited for the teacher and students to return, I looked around the room to get a sense of the environment that Williams had created for herself at Boyd. The room was large and open, but Williams had taken advantage of every inch of space. Student desks were grouped in sets of three and four, with a few desks on their own (a set-up that Williams would later explain to me). Catty-corner from the door was Williams' little nook, made up of a desk, computer, storage drawers, ELMO, etc. Attached to her desk was a low, U-shaped

table (where I sat for the duration of the observations) that she used for individual and small group reading instruction. Along the wall next to Williams' desk was a row of student computers. The back wall of the room sported shelves upon shelves of Accelerated Reader books organized by reading level and a few bean bags were grouped around the shelves for students to utilize during independent reading time.

The wall across from Williams' desk donned a bulletin board where she had displayed several poems, posters of reading comprehension strategies, class rules, etc. Across the front wall of the room was a dry erase board that included the agenda for the day, class assignments and reminders, and various and sundry other postings. Immediately, there were four things that Williams had posted along this wall that caught my attention. Each will be discussed further as part of the findings of this study, but they are an important part of the classroom environment that Williams has created for herself and her students. The first was an outline of a tree that Williams had made out of paper. On it were pictures of her students and their families from Meet the Teacher night. Next to the picture-tree was a handmade sign of the class rules that read:

> We are a team.
> We respect each other.
> We create.
> We celebrate each other's successes.
> We learn from our mistakes.

The third was a small posting that defined 'fair vs. equal' -- on it Williams promised to treat her students fairly, but said that she wouldn't be able to treat them equally because what someone else needs could be very different from what you need. Finally, in the far corner of the room was a poster that said, "reading gives us someplace to go when we have to stay where we are." These

four elements of Williams' classroom seem simple, but they speak to Williams' understanding of her role as a teacher and the perspective from which she approaches her job as an educator.

Aside from the various posters, the abundance of books, and the other typical classroom things, Williams had filled her room with fun decorations that added some life and excitement to the room. Each window and bulletin board was trimmed and embellished and an assortment of DIY decorations hung from the ceiling. Though Williams had taken a rather drab room and turned it into an exciting and fun place to be, she told me that she worked hard to make her classroom a calm and soothing environment, too. She tries to avoid red in her decorations because "it's very high energy," gravitating more towards neutral earth tones and greens "because it's very calming" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Williams also keeps soft music playing in the background because "it calms the kids" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Her students like having the music on and Williams finds that she can't go without it because "it gets too quiet" and boring in there otherwise (Int. Trans., 2/8/17).

Amidst the chaos Williams perceives in the lives of her students, she seeks to create a classroom that is a safe place for them to come. When she and the students return, her room is loud and chaotic, but it doesn't seem to phase her. Williams is more concerned about her students being comfortable in her classroom than she is about it being silent and orderly. She has plenty of rules and enforces them strictly (a topic that will be revisited later), but she allows her students to be eleven years old and stress-free while they are in her room. All at once, Williams' room is a deep, cleansing breath and a crazy dance party. Her classroom is the physical manifestation of what she believes it means to be a teacher -- a delicate balance between structure and freedom,

love and discipline, fun and hard work. Though her job is not one for the faint of heart, Amy Williams thrives in the environment that she has created for herself and her students.

Findings: Emergent Themes Related to Culturally Relevant/Responsive Pedagogy

When analyzing the data retrieved from Amy Williams' interviews and classroom observations, several noteworthy themes emerged. Some themes came from questions I intentionally asked to get Williams' perspective on a certain topic, and some emerged from the direction she led the conversation and what I observed in her classroom. All of the themes detailed below are specific to Williams' experience and paint a complex picture of her understanding.

Williams' respects the academic ability of each of her students and honors the capability of the whole child. Williams makes a point to deeply know the ability of each of her students so that she can hold them to their highest ability. She told me that "even if the child's ability is not on a fifth grade level, I'm still going to treat them with respect" and "hold them to a high expectation" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Williams works hard to preserve the dignity of each students' ability, never putting her students in a situation where they might be embarrassed because of their ability. For example, she would never call on "one of my students who doesn't read on a fifth grade level to read out loud in a fifth grade classroom" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). If she embarrasses her students, "they're not going to do any work for me," so she treats their ability with respect and includes them in class participation in other ways (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). She says that she is "not picking on them by not calling on them," but rather she is respecting their ability and setting them up to be successful in other ways (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Instead of forcing her students into potentially embarrassing situations, she will "call on [them] later because there is

something we might do that I know you know" and will be successful at (Int. Trans., 2/8/17).Williams sets her students up to be successful and then uses those victories to help them increase their ability. She gives her students the chance to be successful in a range where they are comfortable and then pushes them to grow from there.

Additionally, Williams recognizes and honors her students' capabilities outside of academics. She has several students who "struggle with fighting and they struggle with getting their words out, with anger issues," but they are learning how to work together on a basketball team (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Williams says that she's seen their successful teamwork on the court translate into making them "feel more successful in the classroom" (Inter. Trans., 2/8/17). She looks for the successes of her other students outside of the classroom and does her best to honor the capability of the whole child on a daily basis.

Williams works to motivate her students' achievement by making her classroom a place where they want to be. She said that some campuses focus on "pass, pass, pass, which is fine," but she understands that her students aren't completely motivated by that academic focused mindset (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Williams knows that there is so much other stuff going on in the lives of her students that if they come to school and she tries to "put drills down their throat for the test, test, test" her students are "going to shut down on me even before I've started my lesson" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Because she knows her students deeply -- knows that some of them come to school with dirty clothes, knows that some of them will "get a spanking at the end of the day no matter what" -- she has to come up with ways to make her students "want to come to school and learn" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17).

In order to motivate her students to come to school, Williams works to make learning fun and make her classroom a safe and loving place to be. Part of that is keeping her students active in the classroom, never letting school get too "boring." During one observation, I watched as Williams got everyone in the class to stand up because she noticed that there were all a little sluggish and sleepy. As she read their warm up paragraph aloud, she had the students do a jumping jack each time they heard a transitional word (Field Obs., 2/8/17). On another occasion, Williams engaged her students by asking them to show her some new dance moves. After a few seconds, all of the students and Williams were standing up, showing off their best dance moves (Field Obs., 2/9/17). Williams cares deeply about the academic success of her students, but she understands that they won't achieve in that manner if they aren't motivated to come to school in the first place. She works diligently to know her students well so that she can make her classroom a place where her students want to be.

Williams understands the needs of her student population and takes them into consideration in her teaching and treatment of her students. She believes that the students she has now are "so much more in need of that good, positive education" than the student population that she was interacting with at the private school (Int. Trans., 1/26/17). Many of Williams' students have very specific needs (both academic and not) that she has to first, identify, and second, learn how to incorporate into her teaching. She recognizes that the circumstances of many of her students necessitate that they be taught and treated differently than other student populations. This manifests itself most obviously in her students' lack of experience and opportunity, a theme which will be discussed in further detail later. It also requires that she be a little more lenient with student behavior in her classroom.

While Williams holds her students to a high standard of respect and conduct, she allows them to take whatever measures they need (within reason) to set themselves up for success in the classroom. For example, I noticed that while most of Williams' student desks are grouped, there were a few that stood alone in certain parts of the room (Field Obs., 1/27/17). She said that some students choose to sit alone because they feel that it is a better choice for them. Some students "want to sit by themselves so that they don't distract others" and some move to sit alone so that they won't be distracted by others (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). She encourages her students to remove themselves from situations that inhibit their learning or the learning of others. Williams also said that she is "okay with students not sitting in their chairs" as long as they are "not disrupting the learning of [her] other students" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). She has one student who "just cannot be still to save his life," and as long as he is not bothering her other students "he can stand up all he wants" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Williams pays close attention to what her students need to be successful and she allows them to do what they need to do as long as they are not disruptive.

Williams recognizes the importance of a teacher's role in academics, but she focuses much of her time and energy on supporting and developing her students in other ways. Williams fundamentally understands her role as a teacher to be to provide unconditional love and support for her students in whatever ways necessary. Williams' first priority is to show her students that she is on their team. She does this by empowering them to have a mindset that is beyond their circumstances. Many of her students are stuck in bad situations (economic, family, etc.) that they have no control over, but she teaches them to "make up your mind" and decide that "this is not how I want to live the rest of my life" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Williams uses her own experience of rising above her circumstances to inspire her students to work hard. She tells them that it won't

be easy, but wants them to believe that if she could do it, they can do it too. In addition to empowering her students to rise above their situations, she teaches them many of the skills that they need to do so. Williams works hard to develop her students both academically and personally, with a special emphasis on personal development because they are often missing that component at home. Generally, this takes the form of teaching them discipline because she believes that, for many of her students, this is the first time that they are exposed to and held accountable to certain kinds of rules.

Williams has a nuanced view of discipline, understanding when to reign her students in and when to let things slide. Williams understands the importance of developing discipline in her students, but she is not petty about it. For example, one of her students was having a bad day and wore his sweatshirt hood into her classroom. Hoods are not allowed at school, but Williams understands that it is more important for him to "sit in [her] class with a hood on and listen to what [she] has to say" than for her to "ruin his whole day over a hood" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Aside from her 'greater good' view of discipline, Williams also takes discipline on a student by student basis. She told me that "one student might get away with a little more" because she knows that basic discipline, like not talking back or simple respect, was not modeled for them at home (Int. Trans., 2/8/17).

Williams understands that her role as a disciplinarian comes with the territory. While she has some parents who are actively involved in their child's education and discipline, the home-lives of many of her students are such that Williams doesn't encounter as much "parental support at home to help back you up" as she would like when there are discipline issues (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Williams encounters "a lot of discipline" issues in her class, so much so that it is not

effective to simply send a student to the office every time there is a problem (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Instead, she handles most of her disciplinary situations herself. On the occasion of one of my classroom observations, she sent a student into the hallway because he was rolling around on the floor and throwing paper in the air (Field Obs., 2/8/17). When I asked her why she chose to discipline in this way, Williams said that she finds this works best because the student in the hall can still hear what she is teaching, but has been removed as a distraction for the rest of the class. Then, when she reaches an appropriate stopping point, she can step out into the hall and have a conversation with the student without interrupting the lesson. This practice keeps her from having to send students to the office, but still shows them that "she means business" and allows them to have a conversation about the students' action (Int. Trans., 2/8/17).

Williams also prefers this method of discipline because it allows her to make students responsible for their own behavior and accountable for their actions, rather than just sending them to the office to receive a consequence. Additionally, when it is necessary to have a conference with parents and other teachers, Williams likes to include the students in the conference. Especially when parents are supportive of the teacher's disciplinary role, Williams finds it powerful to show the students that the adults in their lives are on the same page and that it is the responsibility of the student to "get [their behavior] under control" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Williams finds that she doesn't need extreme measures of discipline to reach her students, she just has to know them well enough to know what they need to hear to get back on track. No matter who she is disciplining or what the issue is, Williams finds that it is imperative to be consistent when it comes to her rules and how she enforces them.

Williams understands that effective expectation setting can only be achieved through consistency and repetition. She "sets the law down" at the beginning of the year, and spends the year teaching these standards to her students. When they violate the classroom rules, Williams reiterates what is expected of them, rather than punishing them right off the bat. She understands that her students require repetition and reinforcement in this area because this kind of structure is new for many of her students. Williams says that it takes a "good couple of times before [she] finally gets fed up enough" to give students a conduct mark (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). She reminds her students daily of what she expects from them, and eventually, students remind each other of the rules. Williams may seem lenient when it comes to discipline, but her alternative approach to dealing with behavioral issues is tailored to her students and their needs. She noted that when she is consistent with her discipline and unwavering in her expectations, her "students actually [get] a lot better" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). There are some areas, however, where Williams is unwilling to compromise.

Williams understands respect as the foundation on which her classroom is built. Her biggest expectation of her students is respect, something she demands regardless of "what culture you come from" or "what race you are" or "how much money you have" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). In return, Williams promises to respect her students, something that I saw her carry out both in words and actions. She respects her students' abilities by setting them up to succeed in the classroom, rather than putting them in a position to fail. She respects her students' needs by allowing them to sit alone or stand by their desks or wear their hoods. Williams has one student who "doesn't like to be touched" even if it's "just a pat on the shoulder," and she respects his dignity by honoring his aversion to physical contact (Int. Trans., 2/8/17).

Respect in the classroom is important to Williams, but she also requires this from her students to prepare them for life in the real world. She understands that her job is to teach them things besides academics, so she makes sure that her students are "learning lessons for the outside world, too" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Williams encourages her students' personal development by helping them gain skills that will benefit them in the real world. Most importantly to her, Williams respects her students as people and promises to "be behind [them] 100%" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17).

Williams recognizes the uniqueness of her teaching environment, both in its successes and its shortcomings. She said that because Boyd Elementary's student population is 85% economically disadvantaged, the campus principal requires teachers to "know their students before they even set foot in [the] classroom" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Her principal encourages the teachers to "know what they look like," "know how they did on previous tests," "know if they're living with grandma or grandpa," etc. (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Williams said that "some campuses focus more on the academics," and while she knows that is important, she feels like schools are missing the point if "you don't know your students and you don't know where they come from and you don't build those relationships with them" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). She told me that she feels very fortunate to have a campus principal who sees the importance of focusing on the development of the whole child because their school has to reach beyond purely academic demands.

Williams also recognizes that her principal has given her a lot of freedom when it comes to academic curriculum and teaching methods. She doesn't "feel like [she] has been given strict instructions" or limitations and doesn't feel a lot of pressure to fit a certain teaching mold (Int.

Trans., 2/8/17). While she has been given guidelines for what her students "need to know by the STAAR test," she understands that "how [she chooses] to teach is [her] decision" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Though the decision is ultimately hers, she has to take into consideration what her students are capable of handling when it comes to teaching style. In a sense, Williams feels more limited by her student population than she does by her principal or state guidelines when it comes to implementing teaching methods of her choice. For example, Williams likes "putting [students] in groups so they can learn from one another," a practice that goes back to her student-centered teacher training (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). This year she "can't do that so much" because she has a group of students who are more prone to argue and "fight with each other" and not get any work done (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Fortunately, Williams doesn't let this bother her. Instead, she embraces the differences of her students and adopts a "go with the flow" attitude and is ready to change her style "day-to-day, minute by minute" if need be (Int. Trans., 2/8/17).

Williams understands difference in her students outside of race. She told me that "it doesn't matter what color you are," there will always be "low class, middle class, high class" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Williams doesn't "really have a separate" view of races, but rather sees difference in her students in terms of their economic situation (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). She believes that all races are fundamentally equal, but understands that there will be privilege and disadvantage within each race so she focuses her attention on that. Rather than assessing the different needs of her students based on their race or culture, she places emphasis on their economic background and home circumstances. It is possible that she zeroes in on the socioeconomic difference in her students (which is what she feels sets her class apart from other student populations) because that is what she has experience with. Williams was quick to share

with me about the challenges she faced growing up, and her experiences led me to believe that she focuses on socioeconomic privilege or disadvantage as the biggest marker of difference because that is something that she can identify with and understand. While it is certainly important to consider economic and social differences in her students, Williams' "colorblind" perspective causes her to completely disregard race as a factor, something that is ultimately detrimental to her students (Lewis, 2001).

Williams views race as divisive and erases it from her classroom. Williams adamantly stated, several times, that she "[doesn't] see black and white," "[doesn't] see a difference" in races and believes that "we're all equal" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). While this is an admirable worldview, it is not a realistic or helpful one for someone in Williams' position. Williams doesn't ever want her students to feel like she is treating them a certain way or differently from others because of their skin color. She believes that "if they know I love them and I care for them and I treat them equal and fair, then they're going know that I don't see color" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). But the reality is that she does see color even if she is not aware of it. The different constructs of 'respect' that Williams has for her students are tailored to each child -- she treats them differently based on what she knows about them. Whether she realizes it or not, the way that she understands her students' needs is linked to race, and it is not helpful to disregard that component of their lives.

Rather than having a nuanced view of the way that race and culture plays into the lives of her students, Williams erases this factor and focuses solely on economic and social factors. In her experience growing up in poverty, Williams, as a White person, was no different from other poor people, whether they were African-American, Hispanic, White, etc. Because "[she] was not

socially advantaged as a young child," Williams developed a worldview in which race is not a factor of difference (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Even though Williams has risen economically in comparison to her situation growing up, she has a limited and detached understanding of White privilege. She does not identify with the idea of 'White privilege' and therefore is not connected to the inherent institutional and systematic differences that come with being one race or another in the US, in the South, and especially in Deep East Texas. This ideology hinders Williams' ability to address race effectively in the classroom because she doesn't feel that she is any different from anybody else.

Though Williams erases the concept of race amongst her students, that does not mean that she ignores the construct of race completely in her classroom. In her classroom, Williams is "colormute" -- addressing race in some ways and circumstances, but avoiding it in others (Pollock, 2005). Williams works to "raise [her] personal children" not "to see color" and hopes to instill that mindset in her students too, but she also encourages discussion and critical thinking in her class about issues pertaining to race, culture, and difference (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). During several classroom observations, I witnessed conversations that Williams had with her students about race and color and issues that pertain to those themes (Field Obs., 2/8/17). These conversations were broad and generalized, however, because Williams is unable to differentiate between affirming and recognizing race as a historical construct that has and continues to have natural consequences that contribute to inequality, and using race to judge and make distinctions about her students. She feels that a conscious awareness of race leads to judgement and discrimination that she wishes to avoid, so she does not engage in critical conversations about the role of race in her life or in the lives of her students.

Williams understands culture in terms of her students' home lives, but fails to make connections between their circumstances and race/ethnicity. Though Williams is missing out on the race component of deeply understanding her students, she pays close attention to an abundance of other factors in their lives. She acquires as much information as she can about each of her students and understands the 'culture' that they come from in terms of their home environment and the things that influence their behavior, achievement, attitude, etc. Williams pays attention to the backgrounds of her students, saying that you have to "know your students inside and out" from "their home life to what happens in school" in order to "know how to treat them differently" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). She sees that her students come from a variety of backgrounds and understands that what they are exposed to at home impacts them deeply, but she is unable to link their experiences to a broader racial construct. Williams believes that it is more important for her to understand whose "father is in prison" or "mother is not involved," or who "has dirty clothes" or "doesn't have good shoes," than it is to consider how the race of her students, or her race for that matter, impacts their lives (Int. Trans., 2/8/17).

In this understanding, Williams falls into an anthropological tradition that conflates race and culture in an effort to eliminate racialized understandings of human difference (González, 2005). She links the 'culture' of her students to their behaviors and abilities, which is still a racialized perspective because the race of her students is an inherent and influential part of who they are. Williams takes note of the economic and social inequalities and disadvantages that her students face, but does not understand then in a racial context.

Williams understands inequality and disadvantage in terms of what her students do not have access to. For her students, Williams believes that inequality and disadvantage manifests

itself in lack of opportunity and limited exposure to a variety of experiences. She plainly stated that "a lot of our students have not been out of [Treeport] before" and said that "that's inequality" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Williams told me that many of her students "don't know that there's tall buildings, skyscrapers" because they don't have them in Treeport and this is the only place that they have ever been (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). She works hard to make sure that her students know that "there is another side to this world" and that "there are other cities to visit" and "other sidewalks to walk on" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Williams recognizes that her students are limited by their narrow access to opportunities and experiences and she works hard to combat that inequality in her classroom.

Williams described to me a situation that arises often in her classroom because students have a limited understanding of things outside of their narrow worldview:

> When a student is reading about something in a passage that they've never even come across because we don't have that here locally, then I have to pull other materials from the internet, or explain, go into further detail about what it's like outside of our area. (Int. Trans., 1/26/17)

She then told me that she works to combat the inequality of experience and opportunity that she sees in her students by "telling them stories" and "pulling up pictures of different places [she's] been" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Williams is determined to make sure that her students know that "there's somewhere besides here" (Int. Trans., 1/26/17). Last year, her students "took a trip to Austin at the end of the year" and she said that it was priceless "just to give them that experience" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Williams said that it wasn't even about seeing the capital or the Bob Bullock Museum, but about giving the students an opportunity to "get on a big bus with the TV on it and go out of [Treeport] and see those big buildings, and see the big highways" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Williams understands the nature of her community as a limiting factor in the

lives of her students, and consistently tells them that if they "work really hard" they "could get out of this town" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17).

Williams has a much deeper understanding of her community after being in the classroom. When Williams was going through her teacher education program, one of her teachers who taught in a "bigger city" with "bigger schools" described students who would come to class with their hair and teeth never brushed (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). She believed that "that won't ever happen in [her] classroom" because they "live in a small community" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). As soon as Williams got in the classroom, she realized that "it happens in our town, too," and that severe poverty and disadvantage is not reserved for big cities (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Now, Williams is aware that, across big cities and small towns, "kids are suffering for whatever the reason" and she is sensitive to that when interacting with her students and their families (Int. Trans., 2/8/17).

While Williams has a more developed understanding of the shortcomings of her community, she also has a solid grasp on the benefits of living in Treeport. Williams believes that the small, rural nature of the Treeport community gives her more opportunities to be involved in the lives of her students outside of school. She said that the small size of her community makes it possible for her to "be more personable with them, whereas if you were in a big city you wouldn't always run into them at Walmart on the weekends or Target or wherever" (Int. Trans., 1/26/17). Williams told me that she felt that she has "a lot of parental support" because Treeport is a "closer community" (Int. Trans., 1/26/17).

Williams understands the importance of parent involvement in education and works to cultivate good relationships with her students' families. Williams said that "it is very key to have parents on your side" that are "supportive of you" and that "it's harder for you as the teacher

when there's not parental support at home to help back you up whether it'd be discipline or academics" (Int. Trans., 2/81/17). She finds that when students know that she is "in contact with mom or grandma or dad or aunt" it helps reiterate and enforce the expectations that she holds her students to (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Williams' understanding of her student population influences the way that she interacts with parents and she described her basic practices for communicating with her students' families:

> We are required by our principal to make five positive parent contacts weekly. 95% of our contacts are negative, but if you make those five positive ones, when the negatives do come, the parents are not so jumpy at you. They're very understanding. I've always learned and always been taught to sandwich the good with the bad with the good. (Int. Trans., 2/8/18)

Williams works to build as many positive relationships with parents as she can, but realizes that in some cases she'll have to support students on her own. For example, she told me about one student who has been suspended, but she knows that "calling mom is not going to do anything" and "nothing is going to happen" if she calls dad or grandpa (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Williams is not discouraged by this, but willingly takes on additional responsibility for her students as a constant source of love and support. For Williams, the student-teacher relationship takes priority above all things.

Williams understands the development of a relationship with her students as the most important thing that she can do as their teacher. Williams views building a relationship with each of her students as her most critical role as a teacher. She said that each year she tells her students that she doesn't "care if [they] learn anything outside of this school year as long as [they] know that [they] have somebody who supports [them]" and that "they know [she] loves them" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Her goal is to make sure that "they know that you care even when they're not successful at school" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Williams understands that she has to have a

personal relationship with each of her students so that she can know what they need to be successful and know how to go about providing avenues to foster their success.

Williams puts a significant amount of time and energy into growing her relationship with students, both in and out of school. Not only does Williams learn everything she can about her students, she allows them to learn things about her. She told me that she works to be "very transparent with them and very honest with them" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Williams uses her past experiences to identify with her students and affirm their lived experiences, but she also shares her current life with them, telling them stories about her family, the books she's reading, the places she's visited, etc. (Field Obs., 2/8/17). Williams talks to students about things that she is interested in and takes interest in things that are important to them. She uses this knowledge to help her students pick out books that reflect their interests, find out when they have activities that she can attend outside of school, etc. She recognizes that "the small things matter to them" and she takes time to engage students in things that are meaningful to them (Int. Trans., 2/8/17).

During observations in her class, I witnessed Williams live this ideology out in several ways. She remarked on one student's new haircut, showing that she paid attention to him enough to know that he had changed from the day before (Field Obs., 2/8/17). She also commented on the way a student had tied his shoelaces, a technique that she had apparently taken the time to teach him previously (Field Obs., 1/27/17). Things like hair cuts and shoelaces may seem insignificant, but Williams knows that noticing the little things makes all of the difference. She finds that if students know you care for them in the small things, they will be more receptive to you caring for them in bigger ways. Because Williams builds a deep, personal relationship with each of her students from the ground up, she is able to address difficult things with them. The

following is an example of why Williams believes the student-teacher relationship is so important:

> Let me tell you, you get in the classroom, I've got kids who don't brush their teeth. I've got kids who ... He has worn the same clothes for two weeks and I've had to pull him aside and say, "Hey, I noticed." You have to have those conversations. That's where the personality and knowing that person comes in. Because you're able to pull them aside and say, "Hey, I noticed you got the same shirt on for the last two weeks. Look, man, I've been there. I've worn the same shirt for two weeks, but listen, we got a washing machine on campus. If you'll bring me a bag of your clothes, bring them early in the morning. I'll get them washed for you and send them home with you that afternoon and nobody has to know." (Int. Trans., 2/8/17)

Williams takes a deeply humanistic approach to caring for her students, attending to them on an emotional level by "providing reciprocal opportunities to share their lives" (Salazar, 2013).

Furthermore, Williams commitment to loving and supporting her students does not stop when they leave her classroom at the end of the year. She believes that even if she doesn't teach certain student anymore "they'll always be mine" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). She tells her students that "when [they] leave this room, [she's] still going to check on [them}" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). And that she does. Williams refuses to quit caring for her students even after they've moved on to different schools because she realizes that she may be the only consistent source of support in their lives. Williams told me two different stories that exemplify her commitment to her students and the impact that her relationship with them has on their lives:

> Anyway, I went to the middle school to check on a student. He was doing okay, a little in trouble, not a big deal. He was not even in my class last year. He was in the AB Unit. He actually got arrested last year, fifth grade. Got arrested for assaulting the principal and the AP. My dad who is a police officer texts me and says, "Hey, is this your kid?" I'm like, "Yeah." He said, "Well, we got him." I said, "Okay." I said, "Hey, I know the kid is in the room, but tell him I love him. I don't know what stuck with that kid. I've had to restrain the student. He's called me ugly words before." I said, "But please tell that kid I love him. No matter what he did, I know he's in the wrong but he needs to know somebody loves him." My dad told him. He lit up like firecracker like it was no tomorrow." "He is struggling over in sixth grade. I asked his teacher from last year and said, "Hey, you want

> to ride over with me. Let's go check on him." We went and checked on him. (Int. Trans., 2/8/17)

Williams doesn't just take the time to check on students who are struggling -- she is committed to keeping track of students just because she loves and cares for them:

> Well, there's another student I have received an e-mail about at the beginning of the year and said, "Hey, this student is doing great, blah, blah, blah." I thought, "I want to go check on her." I pulled her out of class. The counselor walks to the door. Of course, the student is like, "What did I do wrong." She turns to the corner and she sees me there. She burst out crying. I'm like, "Oh, don't cry, don't cry." She's like, "Ms. Gentry." I was like, "How's school?" She had a few anger things last year. She and I would butt heads quite often. She stumped her foot at me one time because she was mad at me. You know what, that's okay. We worked through it. She knows how to deal with her anger. I went and checked on her just for that and said, "Hey, how's it going?" She's like, "Good." I said, "How are those anger outbursts?" She said, "Well." I said, "Remember the strategies I taught you. You know what, somebody loves you and care for you. It's so important." She just cry and I'm like, "Baby, don't cry. You make me cry." (Int. Trans., 2/8/17)

Williams incorporates her love for her students into her everyday life -- it's woven into the fabric of her day and doesn't end when school the school day is done:

> I got one that lives right behind the gym where my daughter goes to school. Every time I pass by and he's in the yard. I pull over. "Hey, dude. High five. How's it going? How's school going? Grades going good? How's behavior?" Just checking on them. I don't teach them anymore but they'll always be mine. I love them and if they learn one thing, it's that somebody in this world loves them. (Int. Trans., 2/8/17).

Williams understands that she has to know and care for her students well if she wants them to work for her, but her desire to build a relationship with them goes beyond academic achievement. It is obvious that Williams truly and deeply cares for her students, that she loves each of them for who they are, and she supports them unconditionally.

Williams' Understanding of Culturally Relevant/Responsive Pedagogy

Analysis of Williams' interview and observation data revealed several key considerations surrounding her understanding and perception of Culturally Relevant/Responsive Pedagogy.

When I asked Williams if she was familiar with Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, she said that "she'd never really heard that, 'culturally responsive,'" but she immediately gave me an example of what she thought it might mean (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Williams has several students from Burma which sparks discussions in her class about what is traditional or acceptable in other cultures. Off of the top of her head, she felt that "you could say that that's culturally responsive, teaching them the differences" between cultures and helping students learn more about things that they are not familiar with (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Though Williams didn't quite nail down the definition of CR/RP, her ability to interpret the concept quite literally (responding to culture) speaks to her willingness to consider culture in education.

I asked Williams to read the brief description of CR/RP that I provided her, and then we discussed several places where I had seen evidence of things related to CR/RP, both in her interviews and in her classroom observations. I told Williams that I was extremely impressed with her ability to incorporate pieces of this theory into her teaching without being familiar with its tenets or goals. Each time I pointed out a new way in which I had seen her embody aspects of CR/RP and told her how refreshing it was to see it come so naturally, she simply replied, "Thank you. I love my babies. I love my babies" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Though this may seem a non-answer at first, it actually reveals Williams' motivation behind everything that she does. All of the evidence of CR/RP that I noticed in Williams and her classroom is inspired by her deep, deep love for her students.

In Williams' case, CR/RP manifests itself in the small, specific ways, rather than larger, more thematic ways. Each of the components related to CR/RP that I encountered in her interviews and in her classroom were linked clearly to her two grounding concepts: respect and

love. The ideas of respect and love show up most clearly in Williams' approach to discipline, which takes an alternative and reconceptualized form in many culturally responsive classrooms (Busey & Russell, 2016). Williams takes a very personal approach to disciplining her students, showing them love and respect by making sure that they are learning and growing from whatever disciplinary action she chooses to take. Rather than sending her students to the office when they violate her expectations, Williams is kind and patient, teaching them discipline with her discipline. She realizes that the student does not benefit from being shipped out of the classroom, so Williams finds other ways to correct their behavior while still promoting their academics success and personal growth.

Williams also shows evidence of CR/RP in her understanding of 'caring'. Culturally Responsive teachers actively engage in doing something to positively affect the lives of their students, rather than just caring *about* their lives (Gay, 2010). Not only does Williams actively care for her students by attending their sporting events or offering to wash their clothes, she cares for them well by holding them to high academic and personal standards. She cares for her students by honoring their abilities as a whole and relating to them as people. Williams' ability to care in an action-centered way is tied to her foundational beliefs of respect and love. She respects the different needs, challenges, and struggles of her students and loves them enough to actively engage in helping them be successful in all aspects of life. Williams tendency towards culturally responsive caring also manifests itself in her efforts to bind her class together as a family unit. She understands that she would not be "where I am today" if it hadn't been for the family members who stepped into her lives when she was young (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Just as her family

advocated for her, Williams builds a family within her students where they "celebrate each others' successes" (Field Obs., 1/27/17).

Aside from building up a relational and loving family in her classroom, Williams also displays evidence of cultivating a community of learners. One of the posters in her room instructs students to "ask three before me," prompting them to seek help and direction from their peers before coming to the teacher (Field Obs., 1/27/17). In reference to the arrangement of student desks in her classroom, Williams said that she "likes to put them in groups so they can learn from one another" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). During one field observation in Williams' class, she had students discuss their answer for questions they responded to about a reading passage and then come to a conclusion about which was the most correct (Field Obs., 2/8/17). She prefers this approach to teaching because "then they're teaching each other" and she believes that the information is more likely to click "when [they] hear it from another student" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17).

Not only does Williams understand the importance of creating an engaging community of students within her classroom, but she also sees the importance of being involved in her students' community outside of school. She said that the small size of Treeport helps facilitate some of this contact naturally because she often runs into the students at the grocery store or community events. Additionally, she makes every effort to show up for things that are important to her students. She attends basketball and softball games, doing what she can to put significant effort into "building that relationship outside of school" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Even when she isn't able to physically show up to support her students, she makes sure to honor their interests in other ways. When a student of hers was baptized, Williams was unable to attend, but the

student's mom sent her a video of the occasion. At school, Williams thanked the student for sharing that experience with her and let her know that it was "amazing" to be part of her "special moment" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Though Williams understands how crucial it is to be involved in the lives of her students outside of the classroom, she finds that it can be a bit overwhelming at times. She is always happy to "just take 20 minutes out of [her] Saturday" to spend time with her students, but once she starts showing up, they "always want you to come at that point" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Williams knows she can't be at everything, but she does her best "to take some time out to go" when she can (Int. Trans., 2/8/17).

Finally, Williams exhibits a culturally responsive understanding of knowledge. She teaches her students to gather information about things in order to form their own opinions. Williams said she never wants to "overstep the boundary of the parent," but she believes that it is her job to inform her students so that "they can go out" and make up their own minds about things (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). She prompts classroom discussions with her students to "grow their knowledge on that subject," whether it is making connections between what they are reading and the real world or comparing and contrasting experiences of different populations (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Additionally, Williams demonstrates other concepts related to Culturally Relevant/ Responsive Pedagogy, such as an intentional and developed relationship with each student and the creation of an empowering and transformative classroom environment.

Though Williams had never heard of CR/RP, her natural instinct to care fiercely for her students in all ways combined with her lived experiences led her to incorporate many tenets related to CR/RP in her teaching. After discussing where I saw evidence of this in her interviews and observations, I asked Williams to share some about her perception of CR/RP and what she

viewed as potential barriers to its successful implementation. Williams was immediately inclined to answer in relation to how she thought CR/RP fit into the rural setting that she is familiar with. She said that it is very necessary to teach with a culturally responsive mindset in rural settings because there is just as much pain and suffering caused by difference, inequality, disadvantage, etc. as there is in the big cities. Williams believes that it is possibly even more necessary to implement CR/RP in rural areas because students are facing the same issues, but they are not exposed to as many opportunities for growth.

While she understands that it is necessary to implement CR/RP in rural schools with urgency, she does not believe that a rural setting would make the inclusion of CR/RP any more difficult because there would still be a diverse student population. She said that "it doesn't matter what school you teach at," you're still "going to have all those cultural differences" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Williams recognizes that difference "isn't necessarily a race thing," but that a student population can still be diverse in experience in other ways (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). Because of her understanding and interpretation of culture, Williams believes that, regardless of the school setting, it is always possible to use the different lived experiences of students to help them learn from each other and become successful, both academically and personally.

Summary of Findings

Amy Williams is young, vibrant, eager and ambitious. She is honest and tough, deeply compassionate and hilariously goofy. Most notably, however, Williams is loving -- in all ways, at all times, in all things. The way that she teaches and interacts with her students flows from the way that she understands her role as a teacher -- to be a consistent source of love and support for her students. During the time that I interviewed and observed Williams, I gained tremendous

insight into her approach to teaching and how she understands Culturally Relevant/Responsive Pedagogy.

Though Williams is relatively new to the world of classroom teaching, in my time with her she demonstrated a well developed approach to teaching that incorporates lessons from her teacher education, personal experiences, and her understanding of her student population. Williams loves to be hands on, but she also makes it a priority to teach students to take responsibility for their own education. She works diligently to induce "light-bulb moments" and celebrates with her students when something really clicks for them (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). She lives for the small victories and the big ones, making each day count in her classroom by reminding her students that she is there to love and support them no matter what.

For Williams, respect is the ultimate authority in her classroom. She demands it of her students, regardless of their color, creed, or race, and promises to respect them in return. Respect influences everything about her teaching, from the way that she understands her students abilities to the way that she approaches discipline in her classroom. William respects her students by preserving the dignity of the academic ability in the classroom and by honoring their capabilities outside of the classroom. She uses victories in all areas of their capabilities to grow their success at school. Additionally, Williams understands that in order to motivate her students to be successful, she has to respect their time and effort. She refuses to let education be boring, infusing the school day with spontaneous dance parties and joke telling (Field Obs., 2/9/17). Williams understands the needs of her students and the way that she approaches teaching and the treatment of her students reflects the respect that she has for their unique circumstances and experiences.

Williams also demonstrates respect for her students through the way that she approaches discipline in her classroom. She has a developed understanding of what to address and what to allow, disciplining each child in a way that is most meaningful to them. Williams understands that effective expectation setting can only be achieved through consistency and repetition, so she gives her students the grace they need to become accustomed to rules where they once had none. When action is needed in her classroom, Williams prefers to handle discipline herself rather than sending students to the office, because it allows her to teach her students about responsibility. Instead of sending students off to receive impersonal consequences, Williams embraces her role as disciplinarian and uses these interactions with her students to further demonstrate her love for them.

Disciplinarian is just one of the many roles that Williams plays in the lives of her students. She also takes on the traditional role of academic achievement, but she believes that her highest calling is to develop and support her students in other ways. Williams understands that as a teacher, her job is to, first and foremost, unconditionally love and support her students. She does this by empowering her students to look beyond their circumstances and giving them the tools to make that possible. Williams desperately wants her students to realize that there is more to life than what they have known, and she takes it upon herself to support them in the search for something better.

Williams' attributes part of her teaching philosophy to the school environment at Boyd Elementary. Her campus principal places an emphasis on knowing each student as a person -- who their family is, what their life is like at home, what their interests are, what their struggles are, etc. -- and Williams pursues that goal whole-heartedly. She makes a point to know

everything she can about each of her students so that she can best determine how to help them be successful. Williams also recognizes that her principal gives her a lot of freedom to make decisions about what and how to teach her students. She appreciates that she isn't required to fit a certain mold as a teacher, but she also sees that the academic and personal needs of her students mold, and sometimes restrict, her pedagogical choices.

With a student population as racially and culturally diverse as Williams', it is no surprise that her teaching style is influenced by their varied needs and abilities. It is interesting, however, to note that Williams is slow to understand race as a factor of difference in her student population. Instead, she is attuned to their economic circumstances and home-lives, an area of disadvantage that she can more readily identify with and relate to. She very adamantly asserts that she does not see color when it comes to her students, or anyone else for that matter, and makes an effort to erase that construct of difference in her classroom. Williams is not ignorant of issues surrounding race and color, she just has very rigid boundaries separating where she feels comfortable talking about race and where she does not. She is quick to respond to issues of race that come up in class readings, but she has difficulty understanding her students and herself in the context of institutional, systematic, and historical difference grounded in race.

Just as Williams doesn't include race as a factor of difference amongst her students, she doesn't view race in connection with her students' cultural background. Rather, she understands the culture of her students in the context of their home-lives -- their economic circumstances, support system, family relationships, etc. -- and disconnected from race. Additionally, she understands inequality and disadvantage outside of race. She is painfully aware of the different challenges that her students face, but she doesn't view them within a racial framework. Instead,

she understands inequality and disadvantage in terms of what her students do not have access to. Williams recognizes that many of her students have never been out of the Treeport city limits and sees that their limited experiences and opportunities restricts their world view. She works diligently to make sure that her students understand that there is so much more to life than what they know and have experienced.

While Williams understands that the small, rural nature of Treeport acts as a limiting factor in the lives of her students, she also recognizes the benefits in living in such a community. She believes that the close-knit nature of the community allows her to be more involved with her students and their families simply because she is likely to run into them at the grocery store or mall on the weekends. The small size of the community means that Williams is more apt to just see her students around, giving her an opportunity to grow her relationship with them and their parents. Williams believes that she has a good deal of parental support and recognizes how important it is to "have parents on your side" (Int. Trans., 2/8/17). When parents are there to back her up, she finds that her students are more likely to adhere to the expectations, both academic and personal, that Williams sets for them. Though Williams puts significant effort into building positive relationships with parents, she understands that not every student will have a positive support system at home. In this case, Williams takes on added responsibility for that student's academic and personal development without hesitation.

Williams believes that developing a deep and personal relationship with each of her students is her most vital role as a teacher. She understands the importance of academic development and does not shy away from that aspect of her job, but she believes that her principle responsibility is to ensure that each child knows she is there to love and support them at

all times. In order to achieve this, Williams says that you have to know every single thing about your students so that you can determine what they need to be successful and construct ways for them to achieve their goals. Williams grows her relationship with each student by sharing about her experiences and allowing her students to know her as a person, not just as a teacher. She takes an interest in what is important to her students and does her best to make appearances in their lives outside of school. The emphasis that Williams places on the student-teacher relationship is most apparent in her continued pursuit of her students even after they have left her classroom. She undertakes whatever measures necessary to ensure that each of her students, past and present, knows that they have at least one person in their lives who loves them and supports them unconditionally.

Though Williams had never heard of Culturally Relevant/Responsive Pedagogy before this study, evidence of concepts related to this theory cropped up in her interview and observation data. After explaining to her the basic premises of the theory, we discussed the ways in which I had seen some of them manifested in her classroom. Her tendency towards alternative forms of discipline that are tailored to each student in order to best promote their academic and personal development reflects an aspect of teaching closely tied to CR/RP. Additionally, Williams makes a point to actively care *for* her students, not just about them. In this, she demonstrates aspects of culturally responsive caring that are linked to the grounding principles of CR/RP. Williams also works diligently to create a community of learners in her classroom because she understands the importance of having students learn from each other and succeed together as a class. She fosters a classroom environment where students and teacher are one big family, celebrating each others' success and helping each other through their struggles. Not only

does Williams understand the importance of creating a loving community within her classroom, but she also sees the benefit of being involved in her students' communities outside of school. This role can be overwhelming for her at times, but Williams makes every effort to take time out of her own life to be involved in the lives of her students. Williams views knowledge critically and strives to teach her students to gather information before making their own decisions. Furthermore, she pursues and develops an intentional relationship with each of her students and works to affirm their lived experiences in relation to her own as tools for personal and academic growth.

When I asked Williams to reflect a little on what we had discussed about CR/RP, she promptly began addressing the need for culturally responsive teaching in rural schools. A combination of her lived experiences and what she has been exposed to in the classroom has led her to understand that there is just as much cultural and racial diversity, disadvantage, inequality, pain, suffering, etc. in rural areas as there is in big cities. She believes that it is important to implement CR/RP in rural areas in order to address these topics and utilize them as tools for learning. Additionally, she believes that it is even more important to teach with a culturally responsive mindset in rural schools, rather than in urban schools, because rural student populations are exposed to fewer opportunities for growth. Williams understands CR/RP as key to widening the worldview of rural students and opening their eyes to the endless possibilities that exist outside of what they know.

I asked Williams what she thought posed possible barriers to the implementation of CR/RP and she again turned her focus to what that meant in the context of her rural community. She said that the context of a rural setting would not make the inclusion of CR/RP any more difficult

because you would still be dealing with a diverse student population. Williams notes that even if there is no racial diversity, there will still be cultural diversity in a classroom. Her understanding of culture influences her belief about barriers to CR/RP. She said that CR/RP should be achievable in all schools, regardless of the setting or student population, because it is always possible to utilize the varied lived experiences of students as tools for learning and growth, both academically and personally.

While Williams doesn't recognize any substantive barriers to implementing CR/RP in classrooms in general, there are a few things that she must address if she wishes to fully and effectively enact CR/RP in her classroom. First, Williams must reassess her interpretation of difference, culture, and inequality outside of race. In order to truly adopt a culturally responsive mindset, would be necessary for Williams to actively reflect on the way that race influences the lives of her students as well as her own life. While her adamant adherence to the belief that all people are equal is admirable, she must be willing to adjust her worldview to better understand how institutional, systematic and historical factors contribute to the conversation surrounding race. Williams may believe that her 'color-blind' ideology is the best guide to how she should treat her students, but the reality is that she will never be culturally responsive if she cannot learn to incorporate race in her classroom rather than erasing it.

Not only does William need to come to terms with the construct of race in the context of her classroom and the lives of her students, she needs to address her own perception of the role that race plays in her life. Williams is uncomfortable discussing race as a factor of difference because it is outside of her personal experience. She is courageous and bold in many aspects of her teaching, but her reluctance to view race critically limits her ability to teach in a culturally

responsive way. She doesn't view herself as any different than any other person based on race and therefore is unable to evaluate her perceptions, needs, and understandings, as well as those of her students, as they pertain to race. Williams is exceptional -- she is energetic, compassionate, steadfast and daring. Her 'color-blindness' and 'color-muteness' that stems from a lack of a nuanced understanding of the role that race plays in her life and the lives of her students, however, is inhibiting her ability to fully embrace CR/RP. In many ways Williams seems cutting-edge and out-of-the-box, but if she is not willing to make herself uncomfortable and push her limits in this way she will never be able to critically comprehend and incorporate cultural responsiveness in her classroom.

Additionally, Williams needs to reassess the way that she understands inequality and disadvantage when it comes to her students. While Williams is widening her students worldview in a positive way by exposing them to new opportunities and experiences, she must make it clear to her students that she values the experiences and knowledge that they already possess. Instead of viewing their circumstances as entirely disadvantaged, Williams needs to engage in "pedagogical validation of household knowledge with which students come to school" (González, 2005). When "student experience is legitimated as valid," "classroom practices can build on the familiar learning bases" that students have and can help them towards academic success (González, 2005). Just as Williams rescued herself from her circumstances growing up, she feels that her students need rescuing from their lives as well. At times, Williams' own experiences and what she knows or perceives her students to be experiencing, stands in her way of caring for them well. Until she can learn to reframe the way that she sees

and understands her students and stop making deficit-based assumptions about their existing knowledge and experiences, she will not be able to fully engage in CR/RP.

Though Williams knows her students deeply and cares for them unconditionally in a humanistic way, she dehumanizes them by not valuing their existing knowledge and reality (Salzar, 2013). Not only does she need to affirm each students' unique experiences, but she must also be attuned to the "community cultural wealth," a vast "array of knowledge, skills, abilities, and contacts possessed and utilized by communities of color," possessed by her students (Yosso, 2006). The make up of her student population and of the greater Treeport community inherently fosters an abundance of cultural community wealth, something that Williams must not overlook. She is in the practice of affirming specific things and qualities about each student, but she does not recognize or validate what they contribute in connection to their broader racial, economic, or cultural community. She must be careful telling her students that there is "more to life" than what they know, because framing their understandings and abilities in a deficit lens is contrary to the foundations of CR/RP. If she is not careful, Williams' efforts to help her students will position to believe that they do not bring anything worthwhile to the table. Her deficit understanding of her students' home culture serves as a significant barrier to her successful implementation of CR/RP.

A final barrier that stands between Williams and a dynamic understanding of CR/RP is her perception of academic achievement. Williams says that she sets clear expectations for high academic achievement in her classroom, but she devotes much of her time and energy to the development of a strong personal relationship with each of her students. The student-teacher relationship is an integral part of CR/RP, but putting academics on the back-burner is not in line with the foundational pillars of Culturally Responsive Pedagogy outlined by Ladson-Billings.

Williams approach is well-meaning, but if she is not actively holding her students to their highest academic standard she is not really achieving CR/RP.

Amy Williams was made for this. Her teaching philosophy, born out of her personal experiences and deep understanding of her student population, is grounded in an unconditional love for her students and provides hope, encouragement, and support for them at times when no one else does. She is silly and fun, quick to laugh or bust a dance move in her classroom. Her life has been hard, but she isn't jaded. Rather, Williams uses her lived experiences to strengthen herself and her students. She has one foot planted in hard-work, the other rooted in respect, and she is not to be swayed from this stance. Though Williams has some parts of her ideology to wrestle with, she has established her teaching on a foundation that is closely tied to culturally responsive ideas.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

This study emerged from the gaps in the conversation surrounding the intersection of culture and teaching in the classroom, seeking to understand more fully the role that culture plays in teaching in rural Texas elementary schools. The research questions that guided this study focused the attention on three fourth and fifth grade social studies and literacy teachers in Treeport ISD and how they approached their teaching in the context of Culturally Relevant/ Responsive Pedagogy. I conducted a series of interviews and classroom observations with each teacher and then analyzed the data against a coding heuristic I developed from Culturally Relevant Pedagogy, Culturally Responsive Pedagogy, and other tenets related to those theories. This chapter addresses the major themes that emerged across the participants' responses and the implications that those key considerations have for their role as teachers as well as the larger academic conversation concerned with culture and teaching.

Three teachers participated in the study -- Sharon Foster, Carolyn Grant, and Amy Williams. Sharon Foster teaches fourth grade reading and social studies at Armstrong Elementary School, where she's been teaching for almost twenty years. She's good-natured and kind, firm in her beliefs and warm in her demands. Carolyn Grant has taught reading and social studies to Gifted & Talented fifth graders at Baker Elementary School. She's been teaching for over forty years, and is quick to laugh but slow to accept defeat. Grant is a fierce advocate for her students and a general force to be reckoned with. Amy Williams is in her second year in the classroom, teaching reading and social studies to fifth graders at Boyd Elementary School. Williams is young and goofy, but she takes her job as a teacher very seriously. She is an unwavering pillar of love and support for each of her students and roots herself in hard-work and respect.

Key Considerations

While many similar themes emerged during the analysis of the participants' interview and observation data, there were three main considerations that arose as significant findings across all three teachers. The three findings are closely linked to each other and are very personal to the participants. The first key consideration addresses the relationship between each teacher's identity and ideology, how that influences the way they see the world, and how that impacts their approach to teaching. The next consideration focuses on how each teacher's personal exposure to and experience with difference affects how they structure race, culture, and inequality and how those understandings influence their teaching philosophy. Finally, the notion of *comfort* is addressed in regards to each teacher and their ability to effectively implement Culturally Relevant/Responsive Pedagogy. Additionally, this chapter explores the idea of a culturally responsive continuum as a way of understanding cultural relevance/responsiveness in teachers.

Identity, Ideology, and Teaching Philosophy. It is no surprise that a person's identity, how they understand themselves and how they came to that understanding, influences the way that they see the world (Coté, 2002). Each participant's process of identity formation provides immense insight into why they view the world a certain way, and it became clear later on that each participant's worldview impacted their teaching philosophy in significant ways. In a sense, everything that the teachers did, from how they interacted with their students to how they understood parent involvement, was directed by their understanding of themselves, others, and their world. This section looks at the worldview of each of the three participants and discusses how their identity and ideology affects their approach to teaching.

Born and raised in Treeport, Sharon Foster returned there after college to plant her roots and start a family. Her hesitation to ruminate deeply and critically on her personal identity reflects the insular and narrow nature of the community that she was socialized in. There is nothing wrong with Foster's homecoming, but the reality is that the people and ideologies that she came from and continued to surround herself with did not promote the development of a nuanced worldview or self-aware perspectives. Foster's lived experiences and convictions would suggest that she might have a more developed and differentiated worldview, but her personal ideology keeps her from understanding her experience, and the experiences of others, critically.

Foster didn't come from money and was the first member of her family to graduate from college. She identified herself as the biggest breadwinner between her and her husband and believes that she is still low-middle to middle class, just like her family was when she was growing up. She is deeply rooted in her Christian faith and views teaching as a calling. Foster has an abundance of experience with diverse student populations, with diversity manifesting itself in a variety of ways (racial, cultural, economic, etc.). She is ESL certified and places an emphasis on cultivating a personal relationship with each of her students. She believes that all students are capable of learning and she works hard to find ways to help all of her students be successful. In all of these experiences and understandings, Foster has the opportunity to see the world in all of its various dimensions and perspectives.

Foster, however, views the world through a deficit lens that does not allow her to see the subtleties and nuances of life. This plays out most notably in her understanding of her students' parents and their level of involvement in education. Foster has very rigid beliefs about how parental involvement should be approached, and when her students' parents fall short of that she

writes them off. Her restrictive expectations and limited perspective only allows her to see the failings of her students parents, rather than their alternative forms of knowledge and capabilities that could be used to further the learning and growth of students. Whether she realizes it or not, the deficit lens through which Foster views the parents of the community translates into how she understands her students.

While Foster believes that all students are capable of learning, she has a narrow view of what her students are able to comprehend and achieve because of their young age. Just as she has strict criteria that she expects parents to meet, she has a very rigid understanding of what her students should be exposed to and she does not promote expansion beyond that. She feels that many things -- critical view of knowledge, conversations about racial issues, etc. -- are "above their head" and therefor she does not introduce these topics in her classroom. Additionally, Foster has an incredibly inflexible understanding of difference, race, and inequality, that, as a part of her worldview, impacts the way that she teaches. Her experience and exposure to difference, and the way that it influences her teaching, will be discussed further under the next key consideration.

Sharon Foster is full of good intentions -- many positive parts of her personal ideology appear in her teaching philosophy. She deeply cares for her students and works diligently to build relationships with them. She makes an effort to be part of their lives outside of school and pays close attention to their needs, both personal and academic. As long as her rigid and deficit-based worldview goes unchecked, however, her teaching will continue to reflect the narrowness of her personal ideology. Foster's unwillingness to reflect on her identity and identity formation inhibits her from reflecting on her students' identities and their identity formation (as well as that of their parents). As much as Foster believes in her students' abilities and holds them to high

expectations of achievement, she is counteracting their capability by putting them into restrictive boxes based on what she believes they should and should not be exposed to or aware of. Foster will not be able to effectively implement a system of CR/RP until she takes the time to reevaluate the way she views the world and herself in it.

While Foster's personal ideology is rigid and unchanging, Carolyn Grant demonstrates an elasticity of understanding that has allowed her to continually grow and develop over her years in the classroom. Though our conversation surrounding identity revealed that she didn't spend a considerable amount of time reflecting on her personal identity, she is acutely attuned to the identities of her students. Additionally, Grant has an evolving understanding of her identity as a teacher that has allowed her to view her students in a changing light as well.

After marrying a man from the area, Grant moved to Treeport where she has lived and taught since then. Grant told me that her family is financially comfortable and advantaged, to the point that she has been able to teach for a while because it is something she loves and enjoys. She has taught in a variety of settings, both private and public, and has encountered a diverse set of students, both in terms of race, ethnicity, and culture and economic and social experience. Grant's personal ideology is reflected in the way that she has come to understand her role as a teacher over the years. This ideology has changed and shifted over time, demonstrating Grant's awareness of the importance of different perspectives and personal development.

Grant's personal ideology and the way that it influences her teaching is best understood in the context of how she understands her role as a teacher. When Grant first came into the classroom environment, she viewed her class as the congregation to which she would be preaching her lesson. Teaching was a one-way street where information passed from teacher to

student without much exception, per her teaching training. Over the years Grant has come to a much more nuanced understanding of her role as a teacher, viewing herself as a guide for her students as they pursue self-directed learning and growth, both personally and academically. She understands the importance of exposing her students to things outside of their personal and community experience. Grant's shift to placing more emphasis on the needs of her students as the driving factor behind her approach to education is reflective of the shifting of her personal ideology over time.

Though Grant has lived in Treeport for many years and finds herself in the same community as Foster, she seeks out opportunities to develop new perspectives that she can share with her students. She opposes the small mindedness that can come with living in a small, rural community and she counters that tendency by implementing difference as a learning tool in her classroom. Grant recognizes her own privilege, and the privilege of many of her students, and works to bring things into the classroom that push them to "see [things] from someone else's perspective" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17) Grant believes that leadership development is an important part of her role as a teacher and she strives to teach her students to be filled with compassion and to see beyond themselves. Grant views herself as a 'helper' and ingrains in her students that there is no shame in asking for help when they need it. She pays attention to the home-lives of her students and has a nuanced understanding of parent support and involvement. Additionally, the way that Grant has come to understand difference as part of her personal ideology significantly impacts her teaching philosophy, an assertion that will be addressed further by the following key consideration.

Grant is quick to say that the development of her current personal ideology and understanding was brought about by her students. The longer she taught and the more that she interacted with them and began to recognize their individual needs, the more her worldview opened up and she began to gain new insights and perspectives. Now, Grant seeks out opportunities for personal development and brings them into the classroom as well. She appreciates and honors difference in experience, tradition, and belief amongst her students, and promotes deeper understanding of difference rather that just tolerance. While Grant's willingness to consider and reflect on the needs and identities of her students is a significant step in the direction of CR/RP, she cannot fully achieve that goal until she takes the time to think critically about her own identity, how it relates to her students and their identities, and how it influences her approach to teaching.

While the personal identity and ideology of the other two participants is just as important and influential in regards to their teaching philosophy, Amy Williams seems to be the most aware of the way she views the world, why she sees it that way, and how that influences her teaching. Though Williams is not the same person that she was growing up, she recognizes that the way she sees the world stems from her experiences and understandings as a child.

Growing up, Williams had next to nothing. She remembers coming to school with dirty clothes, unwashed hair, and unbrushed teeth. She went without running water and recalls living in a car for some time. She didn't learn to read until the third grade. When it became apparent that her biological parents could not care for her, Williams went to live with an aunt and uncle. Williams worked hard and started a career as a PE teacher in a private school. Eventually,

Williams realized that she wanted to be in the classroom. At 31, she completed her college degree and has been in the classroom at Boyd Elementary for two years.

Now, Williams has a family of her own, a job that she loves, and is comfortably middle class. She attributes her life now to the help of her teachers and her family, but she doesn't discount her own hard work and determination to become something more that what she knew growing up. Williams knows that many her students at Boyd are facing some of the struggles and hardships that she endured growing up and she uses her own lived experiences to affirm those of her students and show them that there is a way to live beyond their current circumstances. Williams' understanding of herself and of her students influences her teaching philosophy and manifests itself in all aspects of her approach in, and out, of the classroom.

So impacted by the support and love that she was shown by her teachers, Williams reflects that attitude of service towards her own students. Her teaching philosophy is rooted in making sure that each of her students sees her as someone who will always love and support them, not matter what. She reinforces this by implementing alternative forms of discipline, preserving the dignity of her students' abilities, teaching respect, and so much more. Williams understands what it's like to be their age and to face the challenges that are up against. She took advantage of opportunities that pulled her out of her limited circumstances, and she teaches her students to do the same. She realizes that the small and rural nature of the Treeport community does not afford a lot of opportunities or experiences to her students, so she makes an effort to inform them that there is a wide world outside of what they know that they can be a part of. Williams' understanding of difference in terms of race, culture, and economic/social class is an important part of her personal identity that was shaped at a young age. She has very strong

convictions about these topics that influence the way she approaches her teaching. This part of her personal ideology will be discussed further within the following key consideration.

Williams utilizes her personal identity as a tool to relate to and help support her students. She does not hide her experiences from them, but rather encourages and uplifts her students by using her own life and understandings as an example of hard work and determination. Her familiarity with hardship and struggle keeps her attuned to the specific and varied needs of her students, helping her to implement structures in her teaching that will best promote their academic and personal success. Though Williams uses her personal identity to engage with the identities of her students, she overlooks the racial component of both herself and her students in this practice. She is on a great track to honest self-reflection and a rich set of perspectives, but Williams can't implement a fully effective CR/RP until she is able to think deeply about all parts of her identity and the identity of her students.

Each of the three participants has a unique demonstration of the relationship between their understanding of themselves and others and their understanding of their role as a teacher. Sharon Foster is removed from the identities of others and seems to be unaware of how her personal identity influences the way that she teaches and treats her students. Carolyn Grant is deeply in tune with the diverse identities of her students and works to discover new perspectives that allow her and her students to learn and grow together. Amy Williams is deeply aware of her identity formation and uses her lived experiences to relate to her students, but she overlooks a critical point of reflection when it comes to identity.

Exposure to difference. Though understanding of difference in terms of race, ethnicity, culture, inequality, economics, etc. can be addressed under each teacher's personal ideology, it is

important to note separately the varied ways that the participants have been exposed to and experienced difference and how those interactions impact the way they approach teaching. Sharon Foster has been exposed to difference in the classroom in large doses. She has seen her student populations shift to reflect the increasing racial and cultural diversity of the Treeport area and she continues to have students with a wide variety of social and economic experiences. Foster understands the student-teacher relationship to be the necessary foundation for all that she hopes to accomplish in the classroom, and she seeks to fully know each student's background, home life, circumstances, culture, etc.

With all of this exposure to diversity of experience, however, Foster has a very narrow understanding of difference that impacts her teaching strategy and limits her ability to fully know her students. Foster says that she is 'color-blind' in the classroom, ignoring the race of her students and focusing instead on their skill level, home-lives, challenges, etc. While these components of difference are important to consider, it is detrimental to dismiss race as a factor of difference because it is inherently tied to so many of the other factors of difference. Foster doesn't consider her own 'racialness' -- how it makes her similar to her students and how it makes her different -- and she doesn't consider the 'racialness' of her students. By eliminating this component of her identity and the identities of her students, she dismisses whole parts of who her students are.

Though she completely avoids race in the classroom, Foster is attuned to other indicators of difference amongst her students. She sees "who doesn't have money" and "who needs help getting food on the weekend," yet she is unable to link these struggles to broader hallmarks of difference (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). She is sympathetic to her students' challenges and does

everything that she can to help them overcome their limited circumstances. She does not, however, have a fundamental understanding of institutional, systematic, and historical social inequality though she is exposed to it every day. Foster's reality is structured by dysconscious racism and classism that does not allow her to be critically conscious of racial and social inequity. She is not blind to difference amongst her students, but she accepts it as the status quo and does little to move beyond that ideology.

Even though Foster lives in a community that has become increasingly diverse over the years, she does not feel that what she has experienced and been exposed to in her lifetime lends itself well to teaching in a culturally responsive way. She said that she is not a 'cultured' person and does not have enough knowledge of other cultures to be able to teach about them well. Foster said that her lack of personal understanding of certain topics makes it difficult for her to included them in her curriculum and address them in her classroom. She recognizes that knowledge is a barrier for her implementation of CR/RP, but based on her prior dealings with and attitude towards difference (especially when dealing with race and culture), she doesn't seem willing to make an effort to become more well informed. Though Foster is surrounded by diversity and difference of all shapes and sizes, her inability to deeply consider the role that these elements play in her life and the lives of her students inhibits her from using difference as a tool for learning and growth in the classroom. Until she can address her distorted understanding of race, Foster will not be able to effectively implement CR/RP in her classroom.

Carolyn Grant has been exposed to difference and diversity in Treeport in much of the same way that Foster has, but her reaction to those experiences couldn't be more different. Grant encounters a wide spectrum of racial, cultural, social, and economic difference within her Gifted

class, an experience that she notes as one of the best things about teaching because she gets the opportunity to view things from a perspective other than her own. She said that the conversations and experiences that she has had with her students and their parents over the years have "enriched her as a person," widened her worldview, and taught her a new appreciation for difference (in all of its forms) (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Grant told me that she is "always learning and growing because of the children" that she teaches (Int. Trans., 2/10/17).

Not only does Grant capitalize on the experiences of her students to expand and develop her own understanding of difference, she has her students use their diverse experiences to teach each other about difference. Grant believes that she and her students are lucky not to be "stuck in a vacuum" where everybody is just like them (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Instead, she encourages sharing and discussion in her classroom so that her students can see "different cultures through the eyes of their classmates" (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Grant is aware of the benefit that diversity adds to a community, and she utilizes difference as a tool for learning and growth, both academic and personal, in her classroom. Though she was not familiar with the terms, Grant has a fairly well developed understanding of cultural competence and sociopolitical consciousness that comes out when she talks about her understanding of difference.

Grant understands the difference between "being tolerant of other people's culture" and "understanding and incorporating it into your lessons" and she is on a great path towards effectively implementing CR/RP in her classroom (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). However, she needs to be more proactive when it comes to including difference in her curriculum. Now, she encourages discourse on race, culture, class, etc. when topics come up in her classroom or when students return from a trip and share about their experiences, but she does not take the initiative to

intentionally craft curriculum and lessons with themes of difference and diversity in mind. Grant has taken advantage of her experience with and exposure to difference, learning from her students and their families and being opened up to things outside of what she personally knows. Her expanded worldview and appreciation of different perspectives pushes her to address themes of difference and diversity in her classroom, but only as they come up. In order to effectively implement CR/RP in her classroom, Grant must initiate learning centered around themes of difference and diversity and not just address them when convenient.

Like Foster and Grant, Amy Williams has been exposed to a wide spectrum of diversity and difference in her community and classrooms. While Foster and Grant have encountered diversity and difference of experience mostly through their students, Williams' understanding of these themes draws from her personal background. Williams is quick to share that she grew up poor and faced many challenges as a child and young adult. Because of her experiences, she is able to relate to her students on a deeper level. Their shared struggles bind them together and she is able to foster a connection with each student in a very real and honest way. Grant uses her personal experiences with economic and social difference to identify with the circumstances of her students and motivate them towards academic and personal growth and success.

Though Williams is able to utilize her personal experiences with difference in many positive ways in her classroom, her background and personal ideology keep her from effectively addressing race with her students. Williams told me that she was taught not to see black and white because all people are the same. Her experience with poverty showed her that she was no different or better or worse than people of other races in her same situation, so it is difficult for Williams to consider race as a factor of difference. Even though she has left those economic and

social circumstances behind, Williams still does not identify with the idea of 'privilege' based on race. Because of this, she does not take the time to reflect on her racial identity, the racial identities of her students or the way that race impacts their lives.

While Williams does not want her students to feel that they are being treated differently because of their skin color, she paradoxically erases race in the classroom. Williams actively pursues a relationship with each of her students and has a deep understanding of their needs, both academic and personal, but she overlooks a significant component of their being by taking race out of the equation. Williams is not unaware of race and its role in society -- I witnessed several critical thinking exercises in her classroom dealing with issues of race and color -- but she is out of touch with the role that it plays in her life and the lives of her students. While Williams' exhibits evidence of many aspects of CR/RP, she will not be able to fully implement this form of teaching until she can more effectively reflect on race as it pertains to herself and to her students.

Though all three participants were exposed in some way to similar degrees of diversity and difference, each teacher responds to these experiences in different ways. Sharon Foster seemed virtually unaffected by her exposure to difference. She sympathizes with the struggles that her students face, but her worldview does not allow her to view difference and diversity critically, making it impossible for her to use it as a means for learning and growth in the classroom. Carolyn Grant recognizes the importance of difference and diversity, and uses it as a tool for personal and academic growth in her classroom. She is reactive, however, rather than proactive in the addressing of these topics which limits her ability to effectively implement CR/RP. Amy Williams has the most personal experience with difference, but her understanding of race and its role in her life and the lives of her students is skewed. She recognizes and knows her

students outside of their racial identity, teaching about diversity and difference in her classroom, but not thinking critically about it as it pertains to herself and her students.

The emergence of this key consideration brings up an important point in the understanding of CR/RP. All of the participants were exposed to difference -- racial, social, cultural, and economic. Yet, they don't show the same number or kind of aspects connected to CR/RP. Therefore, there must be something that pushes a teacher to engage with components related to CR/RP outside of sheer exposure to difference. For Sharon Foster, her culturally responsive tendencies stem from her Christian belief system and the calling that she feels to be in relationship with her students. Her understanding and execution of the student-teacher relationship is the most apparent demonstration of CR/RP in her classroom. For Carolyn Grant, her progressive view of education is what drives her to implement tactics in her classroom related to CR/RP. Grant understands that the bare minimum of 'teacher talks, students listen' isn't enough anymore, so she works diligently to grow her students into self-directed learners. CR/RP is most clearly reflected in Grant's classroom in her commitment to learning with and from her students. For Amy Williams, her teaching tactics related to CR/RP spring forth from her devotion to loving and supporting her students no matter what. The family environment and community of learners that she fosters in her classroom, as well as her interactions with her students outside of school and after they leave her class, are rooted in her devotion to them as people. Williams' understanding of each of her students on a human level is what drives the inclusion of components of CR/RP found in her classroom. Though experience with and exposure to difference is certainly influential when it comes to implementing culturally responsive tactics, that alone is not enough to push a teacher to actively engage with CR/RP.

Understanding of 'comfort'. The final consideration that emerged from the participants' is the idea of 'comfort'. For these teachers, what they are comfortable with and the ways in which they are willing to make themselves uncomfortable impacts how they perceive and approach CR/RP. Each teacher's relationship with comfort is different, but it affects the ways in which each of them are able to draw CR/RP into their classrooms.

Sharon Foster has a very entrenched understanding of comfort when it comes to her classroom and her students. She is content in the way that her classroom is run and what she introduces into the lives of her students. She is comfortable with what she knows and the way that she views the world. Some aspects of CR/RP lie within her comfort zone, like creating a community of learners, but the overall attitude that a teacher must possess to implement CR/RP was something she was obviously uncomfortable with. Foster avoids deep cultural topics in her classroom because she does not feel qualified to address them. She does not draw politics into her curriculum because she believes that her students are not old enough to handle those topics. She shies away from self-reflection and does not critically consider the identities of her students. Foster is wary of the 'extra time' that it would take to teach in line with CR/RP.

When we discussed CR/RP for the first time, she seemed interested in the theory, but did not express an overt desire to make changes to her current pedagogy to reflect the tenets of CR/RP. Foster is the first to admit that she wants what is best for her students, but her unwillingness to push herself and her students outside of her comfort zone is counterintuitive to that proclamation. Foster's understanding of comfort dramatically restricts her ability to effectively implement CR/RP in the classroom. As long as Foster is unwilling to challenge herself to go

above and beyond what she believes she is capable of, she will not be able to teach her students in a way that most effectively promotes academic and personal growth.

Carolyn Grant recognizes that fear has no place in the classroom. She told me that she used to be scared to address difficult topics in the classroom, but now she sees the importance of fostering conversations around difference and diversity. She used to abide by the status quo teaching methods, but as she got older she realized that her students needed more from her. More than once, Grant has willingly made herself uncomfortable in the classroom because she knows that it will benefit her students. She doesn't allow herself to get complacent when it comes to the education of her students. Rather, she is constantly on the lookout for new ways that she and her students can learn from each other. Grant has experience questioning the norm and prioritizing what is best for her students, an admirable quality that she must faithfully maintain if she wants to successfully implement CR/RP.

When we discussed CR/RP, Grant seemed enthusiastic about doing "a little more research" on the theory in order to expand her execution of it in the classroom (Int. Trans., 2/10/17). Willingness to try is half the battle, but Grant must take more initiative to push herself and her students outside of what they are comfortable with. For Grant, she must undergo a notable shift in the way that she includes topics of difference and diversity in her classroom. Rather than addressing them as they come up, Grant must use them as driving factors behind curriculum selection and lesson planning. Additionally, Grant must address the role that she plays in her students' community. She takes an interest in her students' activities and makes an effort to attend events that are important to them, but she recognizes that she can do more. Grant tells her students that they are her number one priority, but in order to live this out, she must be

willing to sacrifice some of her time in order to serve students in all aspects of their lives. Grant said that she would "very much like [her] teaching to be modeled after [CR/RP]," and it is very possible if she recommits herself to becoming comfortable with the uncomfortable (Int. Trans., 2/10/17).

Amy Williams is all about the uncomfortable -- she doesn't shy away from the hard things in life and she teaches her students not to either. She willingly and openly shares from her own experiences and identifies with her students in ways that break the mold of a typical student-teacher relationship. She isn't afraid to fail in front of her students and she teaches them to get back up and keep going when they don't succeed. Williams encourages her students to gather information from a variety of sources before making a decision about what they believe. She is bold and courageous in many ways, breaking down barriers with her students, and virtually fearless. Williams is constantly pushing the boundaries of status quo education, changing and altering her approach to fit what her students need. There is, however, one area where Williams is unwilling, or unable, to make herself uncomfortable that threatens to bring all her other efforts to a grinding halt.

The reality is that Williams is uncomfortable discussing race as a factor of difference as it pertains to herself and her students. She doesn't have a problem incorporating topics pertaining to racial issues in her curriculum, but her personal identity and ideology drives her to eliminate race in the classroom. Williams firmly believes that her "color-blind" ideology is the best lens through which to view her students, but her reluctance to view race critically severely limits her ability to teach in a completely culturally responsive way. It was very apparent to me that Williams was willing to do everything in her power to give her students the best chance at

personal and academic development that she could. If she is serious about loving and supporting her students in all ways at all times, Williams must be willing to reassess her own ideology and voluntarily make herself uncomfortable for the sake of her students.

Implications

Culturally Responsive Continuum. Over the course of this study it became apparent that there was no simple 'yes' or 'no' measure of whether the participants were teaching in a way consistent with CR/RP. Across the participants there was evidence of different aspects of the theories, and because the characteristics of CR/RP are really tenets of 'good teaching,' you would be hard pressed to find a teacher out there who did not exhibit at least one of these characteristics. This study suggests that CR/RP, and the potential for CR/RP, is best measured on a continuum that perceives current application of CR/RP tactics, understanding of the theory, and willingness to learn more about the theories and actively engage in implementing them.

Using this approach, I was better able to qualify each of the participants' relationship with CR/RP at the time of this study. Though Sharon Foster exhibits several characteristics of CR/RP, her lack of foundational understanding of several of its main tenets (cultural competence and sociopolitical competence) and her seeming unwillingness to come to a deeper understanding of the theory places her at the lower end of the spectrum. She earns a place further along the continuum than the end because she does demonstrate several characteristics consistent with CR/RP, but her current unwilling mindset and restrictive worldview keep her from being farther along, and if they persist, will limit her opportunities for advancement along the scale.

Carolyn Grant can be found on the more understanding and engaged end of the spectrum. Grant demonstrates an enthusiastic willingness to further implement elements of CR/RP in her

teaching and has a much more nuanced set of perspectives. Furthermore, Grant has a relatively developed grasp of the tenets of CR/RP, even though she was not familiar with the theory prior to this study. She demonstrates an understanding of cultural competence and sociopolitical consciousness in her teaching philosophy, and also exhibits many other characteristics of CR/RP. All things considered, Grant certainly has room for improvement, but her willingness to engage with, nuanced understanding of, and concrete examples of CR/RP push her well towards the 'yes' end of the CR/RP spectrum.

Amy Williams lies somewhere between Foster and Grant. She demonstrates a number of CR/RP characteristics and utilizes her personal experiences to identify with her students in order to promote their academic and personal development. She works diligently to expand their worldview and broaden their perspectives, but her partially developed understanding of cultural competence and sociopolitical consciousness serves as a barrier to her implementation of CR/RP. Williams goes above and beyond for her students, but her refusal to engage with race as a factor of difference in her life and in the lives of her students restricts her understanding of CR/RP and limits her ability to fully engage with it.

CR/RP is not something that can ever be wholly completed or accomplished. Rather, teachers should always be growing their knowledge and developing their abilities to teach in this way. The purpose of the continuum is not to pin each teacher to a certain spot so that they can be measured against each other. The continuum is not suggested as a measure of a teacher's achievement, but as a way to better understand where teachers are being successful with this theory and what is holding them back.

Culturally Relevant/Responsive Pedagogy and Rural Schools. Aside from introducing the idea of a Culturally Relevant/Responsive continuum, this study also adds to the academic conversation surrounding culture and teaching by providing insight into the role that CR/RP plays in rural schools. Across the teacher participants, it was expressed that teaching in a culturally relevant/responsive manner was just as necessary in rural areas as in urban areas because student populations are still incredibly diverse, regardless of whether it is rooted in economic, social, cultural, or racial difference. Additionally, the teachers noted that it is even more necessary to implement CR/RP in rural areas because, while the students are still encountering difference and the systematic inequality and disadvantage that comes with that, they are exposed to fewer opportunities for growth outside of their personal experiences.

Though the participants felt that CR/RP was much needed in rural areas, they did not believe that it would be more difficult to implement those theories in a rural district rather than in an urban one. The teachers recognize that, no matter the school, there will always be difference of experience to draw from and use as a tool for learning and growth. The teachers see that diversity in their community is represented in many forms, and though it may not look exactly like diversity in more urban communities, it is still something that needs to be addressed. Additionally, they noted that the close-knit nature of rural communities would make it easier to intimately know the experiences of each child and therefore attend to their specific needs for growth and development.

The teachers' understanding of the relationship between CR/RP and rural schools revealed in this study calls for more research to be done to consider how CR/RP can most effectively be implemented and supported in non-urban areas. The existing literature around

culture and teaching in the classroom is lacking in this area, and this study further reveals a need for more investigation into the implementation of CR/RP in rural schools.

Final Thoughts

This study provided a significant amount of insight into what shapes a teacher's understanding of and approach to culture in the classroom. Personal ideology and identity, exposure to and experience with culture, and understanding of comfort were revealed to be important influencers of the teachers' relationship with CR/RP. Furthermore, this study suggests that the implementation of CR/RP and potential to teach in a culturally relevant/responsive way should be measured on a continuum in order to promote a deeper and more thorough understanding of what drives a teacher to implement CR/RP, what limits them in that pursuit, and what can be done to push them towards greater engagement. Finally, this study provides further insight into the relationship between CR/RP and rural schools and acts as a jumping off point for additional investigation in that direction.

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Biography

Anna Catherine Alvis was born and raised in Deep East Texas. She enrolled in the Plan II Honors program at The University of Texas at Austin in the fall of 2013. In college, she was a mentor through the Plan II/KIPP Partnership, interned in the Texas House of Representatives, and advocated for public school finance equity and adequacy. Additionally, she was a member of Delta Gamma Fraternity and led a team of volunteers as part of Greater Austin YoungLife. She graduated with honors in May 2017 and plans to attend graduate school in the fall to earn her Master's in Education at The University of Texas at Austin.